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**MOTHERHOOD: PORTRAITS OF FIVE SINGLE BLACK MOTHERS
AND HOW THEY INFLUENCE THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS
OF THEIR DAUGHTERS**

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OF THEIR DAUGHTERS**

by

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Dedication

First of all, I would like to thank God for this opportunity to pursue my doctorate. With him all things are possible, I am living proof of this. This dissertation has been a journey that has tested my will and spirit and I thank God for never leaving my side.

To my daughter Adanna: Adanna, you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. I feel blessed and honored to be your mother and I thank God for entrusting you to me. I appreciate you trusting Mommy through this process. You have been my inspiration every step of the way. I did this for us! Mommy loves you and will always be there for you! You are my heartbeat that beats outside myself and I am so proud to have you as my daughter.

My family: Mom (Joyce), Dad (Bobby), Cynthia (sister), Bobby (brother), and Taelar (niece). Thank you for believing in me and supporting me through this process. Your prayers and encouraging words sustained me through this journey.

Mom and Dad, you instilled in me the love of God, taught me right from wrong and exposed me. Cynthia and Bobby, I could not ask for a better brother and sister. Taelar, I am so proud of you and I expect you to do great things! I love you all!

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There is conflicting evidence on Black parenting, specifically Black mothers as it relates to their educational participation in their children's lives. This study focuses on the intersection of Black parenting, specifically single Black mothers, their Black experience in society, and their participation in the educational experiences of their daughters. There is a need to explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions of single Black mothers as they raise their daughters from early childhood to high school. For example, some research depicts Black mothers as uncaring about their children's education. The purpose of this study is to examine how these single Black mothers educate and care for their daughters to provide additional insight. The following areas of research were highlighted: the Black experience, the Black family, cultural roles of Black women, the Black mother's standpoint, and the culture of acting white.

The concept addressed in this study is the resiliency of the Black mothers. The statement of the problem is drawn from motherwork, a theoretical framework that looks at distinct ways Black mothers navigate the education experiences of their children. The research questions and qualitative methodological approach of portraiture is different from traditional qualitative work, which focuses on the goodness of the research participant, instead of the failure of research participants. Portraiture paints a portrait of the research participant with words and allows for in-depth dialogue.

Some current research depicts single mothers in a negative perspective. This study provides additional insight on how single Black mothers educate and care for their daughters. This additional information may be applicable to all parents and educators and serves as another source about motherhood for children being raised from early childhood to high school.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	xvi
Prologue	xvii
The Queen: Joyce Ann.....	xviii
Growing Up Little Audra.....	xix
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions.....	10
Significance of the Study.....	10
Method	11
Limitations/Delimitations	12
Assumptions	12
Definitions	13
Organization of the Study	16
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	17
The Black Experience.....	19
The Black Family	22
Cultural Roles of Black Women.....	25
Historical context.....	25
Black mothers as role models	29
Culture of Acting White	34
Black Mothers' Standpoint.....	43
School choice	47
A Black mother's care	48

Motherwork	50
Resilience Research	52
Constructs, identifiers, and predictors	52
Summary	59
Chapter Three: Methodology	62
Purpose of the Study	62
Research Questions	62
Research Design	63
Participant Selection	68
Data Collection	72
Interviews	73
Interview questions	74
Instrumentation	75
Data Analysis	76
Trustworthiness	78
Summary	78
Chapter Four: A Portrait of Synclaire “Every mother should have a village.”	80
Communicating and Interacting with Mackenzie	81
Motherhood is a partnership	81
I had to lead by example	88
The day she went to <i>big girl</i> school	90
Resources outside the Home that Supported Educational Experiences	93
School choice	93
I am always there for her	96
Every mother should have a village	98
Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success	100
The day a White boy called me a Nigger	100

Success is a work in progress	102
When you know better, you do better	106
You can't take away my education	107
Be mindful, people are watching	109
Synclaire's dreams for her daughter	112
Synclaire's final words to mothers	112
Chapter Five: A portrait of Rachel "I wanted to be present for my daughter."	116
Communicating and Interacting with Lakyn	118
Motherhood equals time and love	118
My schools had a lot of resources	119
It was hard to send her off to college	120
Resources outside the Home that supported Educational Experiences	122
School choice	122
My job was a blessing	123
Family was a big support group for me	125
Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success	127
I knew I was Black when I went to school	127
My mother wasn't big on education	128
The benefits of going to college	129
The day she came home crying	130
I did what I had to do	131
Be involved with your children	133
Chapter Six: A portrait of Megan "I'm a Survivor!"	135
Communicating and Interacting with Courtney	137
A mother can't be selfish	137
I pushed my daughter	138
I wanted her to take education seriously	139

I had to let go	140
Resources Outside the Home That Supported Educational Experiences	142
School choice	142
I hated to leave my kids	143
She was exposed outside the home.....	146
I had great family support	148
Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success	151
I have a White name	151
You will finish school.....	152
Being present in my daughter’s life was important	155
I’m a survivor.....	157
She wanted to be around other Blacks	159
I’m still striving for more.....	161
I should have kept her in private school	162
My dream is her dream	163
Stay positive.....	164
Chapter Seven: A Portrait of Pamela “It was like a ray of sunshine.”	168
Communicating and Interacting with Jasmine	169
Mothers teach respect and appreciation.....	169
I was rebellious	170
It was like a ray of sunshine.....	171
Resources Outside the Home that Supported Educational Experiences.....	173
School choice	173
We grew up together	174
Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success	177
Integration was hard for me	177
My own prejudice held me back	178

I had no parental involvement	179
A drop of Black blood makes you Black	181
I did the best I could	183
I'm happy with the outcome	184
I wanted her to have a better life.....	185
Take care of your own children	187
Chapter Eight: A Portrait of Rita "I didn't want to be in poverty."	191
Communicating and Interacting with Her Daughters	193
Respect the gift of children	193
I've come a long way	195
I tried to steer my daughters in the right direction.....	196
Resources outside the Home that supported Educational Experiences	199
School choice	199
I did not always work outside the home	201
I have a close-knit family.....	203
Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment	205
Be proud of being Black and fighting.....	205
I had to fight my peers	207
I didn't want my daughters to fight	209
Racial identity	213
Education allows you to live well.....	215
College was always the expectation	215
Give them your all	216
Give them your best.....	216
Chapter Nine: Analysis	219
Communicating and Interacting with their Daughters.....	219
Resources Outside the Home To Support The Educational Experience	226

Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Daughter's Success	231
Mothers' experiences	231
Black identity as Black females	235
Mother's influence	236
Chapter Ten: Discussion and Conclusion	243
Summary of Findings	243
Mothers' life and educational experiences.	243
Synclaire.....	243
Rachel.....	244
Megan.....	244
Pamela	245
Rita	245
Findings related to the research questions	246
Communicating and interacting with daughters	246
Resources outside the home that supported educational experiences.....	249
Cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment	254
Limitations of the Study	258
Contribution to the Research Literature	259
Conclusion	260
Recommendation for Practice.....	261
Future Research	263
Appendix A	265
Appendix B	266
Appendix C	268
Appendix D	270
References	272

List of Tables

Table 1: Percentage of births to unmarried women with selected demographic characteristic, by race and origin of mother: United States, final 2006 and preliminary 2007	10
Table 2: Black Mothers Interviewed for Study	209

Prologue

Listening is such a great characteristic because of the wealth of knowledge one can attain. Most people have a story to tell. There are stories of joy, pain, anger, disappointment, empowerment, love, loss, and survival. Each story or narrative that is told has the power to resonate and touch the lives of people. Listening is a form of learning. My life has been deeply enriched by listening to my parents, friends, and mentors. By listening to others who have already experienced some of my challenges, I have been able to make good decisions that have affected my life in a positive way. My mother would always tell me that my life would be so much easier if I would just listen. I think there are millions of human beings that can reflect upon a time in their existence when they should have listened.

This study is about listening. I listen to five single Black mothers as they share their narratives on how they were involved in their daughter's educational experiences. These stories address their experiences, behaviors, and actions as mothers. My hope is that these stories provide additional knowledge and encouragement to all mothers. This dissertation examines the parental roles of single Black mothers and the influence they have on their daughters' educational success. As I sit at the table typing on my MacBook, I begin to reflect on the influence of my own mother and her willingness to ensure that my siblings and I each graduated from college. This is my story of a loving mother's influence.

The Queen: Joyce Ann

Joyce, my mother, was the third oldest of eight children born to my maternal grandparents. She always told me how education changed her life. She recounted her days picking cotton and how poor her family was. She would say, “We were dirt poor.” She also acknowledged that my grandfather and grandmother were both hard workers and did the best they could to support their family.

Realizing at an early age that her parents would not be able to send her to college, my mother determined that she would send herself. She told me that she decided she would work hard and become the valedictorian of her school. She explained to me how reading books and the *Reader’s Digest* exposed her to a world beyond her own. It was through books that she was allowed to imagine the huge world that existed. In addition, she volunteered and took part in church activities to give her exposure outside the home. Observation was also a critical tool my mother used. She would watch people in her environment and observe their occupations, behaviors and actions in order to gain a perspective of where and what she wanted to be when she grew older.

My mother studied hard. She would even hide in the bathtub on numerous occasions to get away from her siblings to study. Joyce Ann was labeled the bookworm of the family. But her dreams came true; her senior year she became the valedictorian of her high school. She was given a scholarship to attend an historically Black college that would be the beginning of her new life. She vowed to never return to the life she had known before.

In college, my mother experienced many great things. If you ask her today, college is still one of the best periods in her life. She asserts that she met many people from different backgrounds and had great teachers. Her parents had instilled in her right from wrong, and she would have to use the skills she was taught in order to be successful in college. She is proud of the fact that she worked as a tutor, making \$50 a month to supplement her scholarships and grants. When there were times that she needed money beyond that, my grandmother would have bake sales to raise money and send it to her. She also spoke of college as preparation for living the “American dream.” When her classmates would be at parties she would be in her room studying and thinking of life beyond college.

Joyce Ann went on to graduate from college and have a wonderful career with the federal government. She vividly remembers her first job paying \$5,000 a year, which was a lot of money to her at the time. She adds that to her that was a lot of money. She then met my father and together they had three wonderful children and began their American dream as a Black middle-class family. She has always said that if it weren’t for education and God she would not have the blessings and opportunities life has presented to her and her family.

Growing Up Little Audra

I am the middle child. I have an older sister, Cynthia and younger brother, Bobby. I must admit that I was the most rebellious and defiant of all the children. However, my siblings and I are very close, we love each other and support each other no

matter how angry we may become at one another. I know deep down my parents are proud that all their children have a college degree.

I was always aware that I was different. As I looked at classmates and friends, I realized the way my parents ran our house was not the same. For example, I was raised to fear my parents, but also understood they loved me and supported me. As my pastor would say, my parents were dictators. We were not allowed to question their directives. Since this was instilled at an early age, I never questioned how things were done. For example, we attended church every Sunday, and you had to be on your deathbed to miss church. My siblings and I were required to learn Bible verses and recite them at the dinner table. I still remember this Bible verse holder that was part of the centerpiece at dinnertime and each child was required to take a card and recite the verse. Dinnertime was also a time to talk about daily activities.

My father was on active duty in the military and my mother worked for the federal government. Dad provided structure and discipline for the family, yet was very humorous. I still remember how my father would hide in our house when we were kids and scare us. In the winter, he would say “make sure Jack Frost isn’t nibbling at your toes.” I got the name “Little Audra” from my dad. This is what he has always called me and still does.

My mom had what I called words of wisdom for my siblings and I; she would recite phrases that had a meaning behind them and if you know “the queen” you would take heed.

That dog won't hunt. This meant that she knew you were being untruthful in response to her question. In other words try again.

You make your bed hard you have to lay in it. This meant I was responsible for my actions and the consequences that accompany those actions.

If you lie, you will steal, if you steal, you will kill. This is self-explanatory.

There is a place that they have for people who do not want to listen to authority; it's called jail.

She also taught me to accept people for who they were. She instilled in me the necessity to always treat people with dignity and respect, because it is the Christian way and that it is required of me as a human being. As I reflect, I am grateful for those words of wisdom, they kept me grounded and out of trouble.

One of my fondest memories is traveling around the country. I can honestly say as a child we visited at least 45 of the 50 states. Every summer my parents would plan a 2-week vacation for our family. We would rise before dawn, gather in our van, and head out on the road. As a child I did not understand the impact traveling would have on my later years. As we traveled in our van affectionately known as “Ol’ Red,” memories of arguing with siblings and laughter among the family cross my mind. I did a lot of sleeping and I can recall my dad yelling, “Y’all are going to sleep your life away!” When we would reach a destination of interest, we were required to get out of Ol’ Red and take a picture. My dad faithfully carried his old Canon camera with him. Come to think of it, this is probably why I like to take pictures when I travel.

The best part of our vacation, in addition to our travel destination, was looking for Waffle House restaurants as we traveled. There was nothing better than the Waffle House staff greeting you with, “Welcome to the Waffle House!” and the aroma of waffles, eggs, hash browns, sausage, and bacon in the air. As we sat around the breakfast table, my mother would outline our plans for the day and the exciting places we would visit as my dad sat sipping his hot coffee looking at his atlas for directions to our destination. Those travels took us to the Grand Canyon, San Diego, Mount Rushmore, Washington, DC, and Disneyworld, to name a few locations.

In our household, the expectation was to attend college, period. There were no arguments from my siblings or me. I was always placed in higher-level classes and stayed competitive academically. I was a natural in math and science, but struggled with writing. I remember my mother telling me not to verbalize words I could not spell. If I asked her what a word meant she would make me get a dictionary and look up the definition of the word. She was very particular on how we spoke and articulated our words. For instance, we could not say, “I have to go pee.” We had to say, “I need to urinate.” We could not use “boo-boo.” We had to say, “bowel movement.” I was ridiculed as a child because of the way I spoke. My Black friends would tease me by saying that I spoke like a White person. It was an inner struggle for me because I believed in my mother and what she taught me, however I wanted to be accepted by friends as well.

In addition, my parents would always encourage my siblings and I to be the best we could be in the classroom. My parents were always clear that education was a defining factor in their lives and their ability to provide for our family. Education provided my parents economic security, which afforded my family the ability to take summer vacations, have an abundance of gifts for Christmas for my siblings, participate in sporting activities, have awesome birthday parties, and live a very comfortable life.

When I reached high school, I became a very rebellious adolescent. I was enrolled in my neighborhood school, but I started to hang out with students who were not a good influence on me. I came home one day and my mother informed me that she was transferring me to a predominantly white high school across town. I had no choice in the matter. She told me that she wanted me to make something of myself and that a different environment would help me become a better person. I accompanied her to the principal's office of my new high school, while my mother petitioned for a majority to minority transfer to attend this school. A majority to minority transfer is a voluntary transfer offered to a student who wishes to transfer from his or her zoned school, where his or her ethnicity is in the majority, to a school where his or her ethnicity is in the minority (Houston Independent School District, 2010). I was admitted and began attending school there. I was in complete culture shock. I had gone from attending a predominantly Black school to a predominantly white school. It was very hard to adjust. I was the only Black student in my classes and I felt very isolated and alone. I even began to question whether or not I was still smart.

As time passed, I began to acclimate to my new environment and thrive. I met some very nice people and my life began to change. I know in my heart, it was the vision of my mother to move me to another high school where I would be in a better position to attend college. That vision has now landed me in graduate school working on a Ph.D. and being an influence to my 11-year old daughter. There is definitely power in education and exposure to different environments.

I share these experiences because they set the foundation for why education is important to me and the opportunities education can potentially provide in the lives of others. The most connected aspect of my life to this research is the daily experience I have of being a single Black mother who interacts and participates in my daughter's life. Based upon the teachings of my mother (and father) growing up, I was equipped with the educational tools that have allowed me to be an example and teacher to my daughter.

These educational tools have allowed me to be an involved parent inside and outside the classroom. I understand the importance of teaching my child to have a thirst for knowledge. Instructing her to get a dictionary and read the definition of a word, when they question its meaning. The importance of reading to my daughter and the importance of her reading back to me. The countless questions: Have you done your homework? Do you need help with your homework? What happened at school today? Do you know that I love you and I am proud of you? This interaction with my child must be done simultaneously while loving, nurturing, and disciplining her to be able to coexist in America as a Black child.

I know this must take place, because my mother took the same actions with my siblings and me to ensure we would thrive in this society. I believe mothers, deep in the human core, wants what is best for their child; after all they are a reflection of us.

Chapter One: Introduction

According to Epstein (2001), research shows a strong relationship between parental involvement and the academic success of their children. The definition of parental involvement is defined as parental participation in the educational process and experiences of their children (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Scholars such as Bornstein (2005) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) confirm that parenting influences a child's welfare. For example, highly educated parents are expected to stress the importance of school and scholastic endeavors (Jeynes, 2007). The most stubborn barriers to parity in entrance to college are in social class background (McDonough, 1997). Often, social class background is measured in terms of parental educational levels, which are strongly associated with student educational achievement. A significant body of sociological research highlights the importance of parents' educational attainment and family-related resources as factors in their children's educational achievements (Blau & Duncan 1967; Jencks 1972; Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969). In addition, some research indicates that educators place great value on parental involvement to elevate positive educational outcomes among students who face certain disadvantages (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Jeynes, 2005a; McBride & Lin, 1996). More often than not, students who are at a disadvantage because of their social class background are also students of color (NCES, 2001).

Brooks-Dunn and Markman (2005) indicate that parenting involves engaging in activities with their children which are categorized into seven behaviors: (a) nurturing;

(b) discipline; (c) teaching; (d) language; (e) monitoring; (f) management; and, (g) materials. For instance, some parenting activities include reading with their children, helping with homework, attending extracurricular school events, and encouraging college enrollment (Thompson, 2003).

Brooks-Dunn and Markman (2005) also assert there are significant racial and ethnic variations in parenting behaviors that play a role in the educational success of their children. When there is comparison across racial and ethnic groups in parenting behaviors three considerations are relevant:

First, whether parenting behaviors are universal or specific to time and place; second, how representative the parenting behaviors typically measured and developed using middle-class white samples are of other groups; and third, whether a particular society "privileges" certain parenting behaviors. (p. 147)

It is noteworthy that most of the research on parenting is focused on White, non-Hispanic families (Cooper, 2007) and is racially biased (Cooper, 2009). Black parents, specifically those with low incomes or working class status, are linked “to a dichotomy that constructs them as lacking educational presence, values, and care when contrasted with White, middle-class parents who are constructed as being present, helpful, and caring” (Cooper, 2009, p. 382). This false dichotomy brings racial bias to the educational practices of educators when interacting with Black parents (Cooper, 2009). However, there is a strong legacy of Black parents being involved in their children’s education (Cooper, 2009). Cooper (2007) also indicates that Black families have accepted and pursued education to escape the harsh realities of poverty and detachment

from society in order to achieve their personal and professional goals. Black families have long understood that education was a path to liberation (Anderson, 1988; Allen & Jewel, 1995). Allen and Jewel (1995) explain that Blacks recognized that education was the vehicle for combating racist beliefs and improving the living conditions for their families.

During segregation, Blacks demonstrated ways in which education was valued. For example, Black parents gave Black principals and teachers permission to educate their children (Fields-Smith, 2005). The home-school relationship during segregation, particularly in the South, was characterized as collaborative, thus, creating an atmosphere of “trust and mutual respect between home and school” (Comer, 1986, p. 443). Edwards (1993) depicts Black parents as inspired to do all they could to help their children accomplish more educationally than they had accomplished themselves. With this in mind, Black parents protested against school boards, joined school councils, and publicly challenged city officials to develop educational standards and resources (Epstein, 2006; Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 2001; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006). In this period of history, Black parents, educators, and community leaders were bound by a common set of expectations best summarized by the West African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child.” This approach to child rearing enhances the chances for their children’s academic success (Fields-Smith, 2005). Moreover, the Black teachers were important people that placed the needs of Black children at the core of the school’s mission (Siddle-Walker, 2001). Siddle-Walker (2001) asserted that “teachers are

consistently remembered for their mother-like and father-like behaviors, for having high expectations, for motivating students to excel and providing resources to address perceived needs” (p. 752).

However, in the 1950s with desegregation, Black parents were forced to contend with different views, specifically, “with segregation within, rather than between, schools’ and teachers’ low expectations for their children” (Fields-Smith, 2005, p. 133). A study on Black parents by Fields-Smith (2004) highlighted contrasts to the parents’ historical counterparts of segregation. Post-segregation, Black parents had varying levels of trust of teachers, while the majority believed they needed to carefully monitor teacher-child interactions. In addition, parents noted the need to frequently advocate on their children’s behalf at the classroom level.

Fields-Smith (2004) also found that Black parents’ roles required them to engage in learning activities in the home that went beyond what was the norm for parents activities to supplement the education the Black children received at school. The findings indicate contemporary Black parents must have knowledge of school affairs and a network inside and outside the schools. These actions are labeled “a prerequisite of opportunity and access” (p.134).

Another important aspect of contemporary American families is the percentage of households headed by single women. McLanahan and Booth (1989) assert that families headed by single women have become a “common phenomenon that promises to alter the social and economic context of family life for the future generations of

Americans” (p. 557). Furthermore, Bumpass and Sweet (1989a) assert single-parent families have become an inevitable fact of American life.

Moreover, Black families headed by single women have more than tripled in the last 40 years (McLoyd, 1990). Families headed by single Black mothers rose from 28% to 44% between 1970 and 2000 (U.S Census Bureau, 2000a). Currently, 70% of Black children are born to unmarried Black women (National Center on Vital Statistics, 2007). Hill (2003) asserts, that “most single-parent families headed by Black women are depicted as “broken” while two-parent families, the norm for Whites, are described as “intact” (p. 69). Research suggests children from single-parent families are more likely to experience poverty (Duncan & Rogers, 1991; Eggebeen & Lichter, 1991), to perform below average in school (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), to have sex earlier, to give birth before marriage (Wu, Cherlin, & Bumpass, 1997), to cohabitate (Thorton, 1991), and to marry early and experience trouble in their own marriages (Kiernan & Hobcraft, 1996; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988).

Black single mothers must assume the role of economic and primary childcare provider (Hill, 2003). In addition, when these roles are intertwined, they (these single parents) emphasize inflexible jobs as one factor in limiting relationships with their children’s teachers (Fields-Smith, 2005). Herzog and Sudia (1971) describe the challenge of a one-parent Black family:

Few would deny that it is a difficult and demanding role. For many, it is a dual role, as homemaker-child-rearer and as breadwinner. By definition, it is a role that must be enacted without psychological and physical support of a parent

partner to help with household responsibilities, family decisions, and all that child rearing involves. For many, it includes reduction in income, social status, and social activities, posing a struggle against resentment, isolation, and self-doubt. (Hill, 1971, p. 22)

Single parents, specifically single Black mothers do not have the comfort of dividing parenting and household responsibilities at home (Fields-Smith, 2005), and therefore face greater stress in balancing their roles (role overload).

Finally, it should be noted that the researcher understands that Black fathers may be very involved with their daughters' upbringing and educational experiences in the Black family as well. However, this study will focus solely on the parental involvement relationship of Black mothers and daughters.

Statement of the Problem

According to Ladson-Billings (2009) no educational obstacle has been more challenging than improving the academic achievement of Black students. She asserts that Black students have been burdened with the history of "denied education, separate and unequal education and exposure to unsafe and substandard inner-city schools" (p. xv).

Although the achievement gap has closed to some degree over the last ten years, there is still a gap. Black students remain behind their White counterparts on standard academic achievement measures (Bray, 1987). Nationwide, three in ten students fail to graduate from high school and nearly 50% of historically underrepresented students do not complete high school on time (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center,

2009). In 1992, 82% of students whose parents were college-educated enrolled in college directly out of high school, but only 54% of students whose parents had completed high school, and only 36% of students whose parents had less than a high school diploma immediately enrolled in college after high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In 1992, 64% of whites, but only 55% of blacks and 52% of Hispanics immediately enrolled in college after high school. In 1992, only 44% of low-income families, while 80% of high-income families immediately enrolled in college after high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

According to Slaughter and Epps (1987) Black families have been successful and resilient at helping their children cope with the schooling process. Black parents are their children's earliest teachers because their priorities, expectancies, and behaviors, influence the child's achievement (Slaughter & Epps, 1987). They suggest four approaches parents use to influence the academic achievement of their children: "parent as decision maker, parent as supporter, parent as mediator, and parent as teacher" (p. 6).

In addition, Black parents influence their children's academic achievement directly by the kind of educational environment they provide in the home (Slaughter & Epps, 1987). Furthermore, Clark (1983) specifies that Black families with successful achievers provide a home atmosphere that is strongly supportive of academic achievement.

There is conflicting evidence in the research about the Black mothers' involvement with their children's education. Some scholars assert that Black mothers are

inactive, disconnected, hostile, or challenging (Cooper, 2005; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Edwards, 1993; Henig, 1994; Koonce & Harper, 2005) and tend to be irrational, threatening, and have little concern for their children's education (Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1989; Johnson & Staples, 2005; Wallace, 1979).

Other research presents Black mothers in a more favorable light and indicates their methods of parenting differ from the traditional literature which stereotypes the "the good mother," as based on the parenting styles of White mothers (Cooper, 2007). For example, Black mothers tend to use culturally relevant strategies to navigate primarily White educational systems to be resilient in the middle of education racism and to encourage their children to be academically successful (Cooper, 2007; Thompson, 2003).

There are limited studies investigating Black parenting as a factor in preparing their children to be college ready and graduate with a college degree. Reddick and Willie (2010) assert that not much has been written about mothers and their contribution to the success of their children, therefore making the fair assumption that mothers tend to be ignored. Black mothers tend to face many socio-cultural challenges with the added pressure of preparing their children for academic success (Cooper, 2005; Collins 1987). This is problematic because it infrequently and inaccurately accounts for the ways that working class Black parents participate in their children's education and achievement (Cooper, 2009).

Given this conflicting research there is a need to explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions of single Black mothers as they raise their children from early childhood to high school. The need for research is prevalent because the educational values and behaviors of Black mothers are seldom acknowledged (Cooper, 2005, 2009). Specifically, there is little research on how they encourage college aspirations for their children (Cooper, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this study is the parental involvement of single Black mothers with their daughters. The intent of this research study is to identify and explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions of four single Black mothers, with daughters who have been successful in their K-16 education. The information gathered from this study can provide insight into the parental involvement of these single Black mothers as they raised their daughters from early childhood to high school. In addition, the researcher will use the data collected from the study to determine if the actions and behaviors of the single Black mothers can provide additional understanding about parenting.

This study could also provide a perspective of positionality that will enhance the current biased ideologies behind educational practices of educators. Positionality is defined as how a person is socially located in relation to others given background factors such as race, class, and gender (Maher & Tetreault, 1993; Martin & VanGunten, 2002). The researcher is a single Black mother who recognizes the perceived biases she brings

into the study and has chosen a methodology that will allow her to remain objective throughout the study.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study about single Black mothers and their daughters' educational experiences from early childhood to high school.

1. How do mothers communicate and interact with their daughters regarding educational success at stages from early childhood through high school?
2. What resources do mothers draw upon outside their home regarding their daughters' education experience?
3. How do mothers address concerns of cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with their daughters in the context of educational success?

Significance of the Study

This study will add to the small body of research on how single Black women parent. First, insight on how single Black mothers influence their children's education is critical to educators (Cooper, 2005). Second, practitioners and professionals can benefit from this additional knowledge given that these students represent 30% of our public school population (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The table below illustrates the significant population of Black children that are born to Black mothers in our nation. The table also highlights that unwed Black mothers lead the nation in childbirths.

Table 1.

Percentage of births to unmarried women with selected demographic characteristic, by race and origin of mother: United States, final 2006 and preliminary 2007.

Race/Ethnicity	2007	2006
All races and origins	39.7	38.5
Non-Hispanic, White	27.8	26.6
Non-Hispanic, Black	71.6	70.7
American Indian/Alaska Native	65.2	64.6
Asian or Pacific Islander	16.9	16.5
Hispanic	51.3	49.9

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics Reports, Volume 57, Number 12, March 18, 2009

Given the high percentage of this evolving population, the probability of practitioners and professionals interacting with the daughters of these unwed Black mothers during elementary, middle, and high school is increased. Therefore, having insight on how single Black mothers raise their daughters can enhance their experiences with these Black mothers and daughters.

In addition, this study may enhance their understanding and give a cultural perspective of the Black children being raised by Black mothers. Finally, this study can provide additional knowledge to all parents who are raising children during early childhood to high school.

Method

In this study, the researcher used portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) focusing on the experiences, behaviors, and actions of Black mothers. According to Dixson, Chapman, and Hill (2005), researchers use portraiture to investigate “ways in

which subjects meet, negotiate and overcome challenges” (p. 18). The sample size was five single Black mothers. In order to identify the participants, the researcher chose purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher “to select information-rich cases for in depth study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Furthermore, through open-ended questions mothers will describe how they communicate, interact, and address cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment in their role as a parent. Portraiture will enrich the understanding of how these Black mothers are involved with their daughters’ educational experiences from early childhood through high school.

Limitations/Delimitations

While this study offers an opportunity to understand the experiences, behaviors, and actions of single Black mothers as they raise their daughters from early childhood to high school, the following limitations are acknowledged:

1. The study will focus on single Black mothers in a limited geographical region of the United States.
2. The sample of participants in this study will include only Black mothers and generalizations to other racial-ethnic groups might not be possible.
3. Finally, the qualitative sample size for this study will be too small for generalization to be made for all Black mothers.

Assumptions

Black parents, specifically Black mothers, have cultural values and norms which are in direct opposition to “good schooling” ideologies from educators (Edwards,

Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2001; Yan 2000); which brings about the illusion that low-income and working-class Black mothers are a liability to their children's educational development (Cooper, 2007). The following assumptions will direct this study:

1. Black mothers care about their daughter's education and life experience.
2. Black mothers must balance their daughter's physical survival and educational care to raise competent and resilient children.
3. Black mothers must empower their daughters to co-exist in a historically racist society.
4. The cultural role of Black mothers is distinctly different from other ethnic groups.
5. Some educators still continue to misunderstand how a Black mother cares for her child.
6. Some schoolteachers are not culturally sensitive towards Black children in their classrooms.

Definitions

Acting White: Equating excellent performance in school with a loss of African American identity, which translates as doing well in school is seen as “acting White” (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Adversity: Negative life circumstances, which are associated with exposure to a threat or adjustment difficulties (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 1999; Rutter, 1999, 2000).

Black (used synonymously with African American): Refers to people having origins in any of the Black race groups of Africa. It includes people who reported “Black, African Am., or Negro” or wrote in entries such as African American, Afro American, Nigerian, or Haitian (United States Census, 2000).

Black mother’s standpoint: Everyday, taken for granted knowledge shared by members of a group such as Black mothers (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Blood mother: Biological mothers that are expected to raise their children (Collins, 1987).

Collective Identity: “People’s sense of who they are, their ‘we-feeling’ or ‘belong’” (Ogbu, 2004, p. 3).

College Knowledge: Step necessary to prepare for higher education. These steps include knowing how to finance a college education, completing college admission procedures, and making a connection between career and educational goals (Vargas, 2004).

Fictive kin: “Familial relationship with people who are not related by blood and who may not live with the nuclear family” (Kane, 2000, p. 693).

Matriarch: A Black woman who is head ruler of her family and raises the children. (Collins, 1987, p. 4).

Motherwork: The idea that race, class, and gender are interlocking aspects of Black women's identity, meaning-making, and mothering (Collins, 1994).

Othermother: Assists bloodmothers with the distribution of mothering responsibilities (Troester, 1984).

Positionality: How one is socially located in relation to others given background factors such as race, class, and gender (Maher & Tetreault, 1993; Martin & VanGunten, 2002).

Positive adaptation: The achievement of success despite negative circumstances in the developmental process (Garmezy, 1990; Luther & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992).

Protective factors: "Enable individuals to circumvent life stressors" (Garmezy, 1991, p. 421).

Resilience: "A class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk" (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75).

School choice: Choices of Black mothers that are built around culturally relevant factors, concern for their well being, and their interest in their children's academic success (Cooper, 2005).

Self-esteem: The global attitude about the adolescent, including her perspective of how capable, worthwhile, and successful she feels she is as a person (Joseph, 1994; Rosenberg, 1965).

Single-mother: This refers to all non-married mothers with dependent children (McLanahan & Booth, 1989)

Organization of the Study

This chapter provides the researcher's direction of the study. It introduces the study and gives pertinent background information that describes the purpose of the study. Chapter two will provide a review of literature discussing applicable psychological and sociological research on Black mothers and resilience. In addition, chapter two provides a thorough description of the theoretical framework and how this study seeks to expand the literature on resilience by focusing on Black mothers and how they care for their children's education. Chapter three outlines the proposed method for the research study and provides details on how the researcher intends to conduct the study. Chapter four illustrates the portrait of Synclaire, a single Black mother with a bachelor's degree. Chapter five illustrates the portrait of Rachel, a single Black mother with some exposure to college. Chapter six illustrates the portrait of Megan, a single Black mother with a master's degree. Chapter seven illustrates the portrait of Pamela, a single Black mother who dropped out in the 10th grade. Chapter eight illustrates the portrait of Rita, a single Black mother with a doctorate degree. Chapter nine examines the data analysis derived from the mothers in relation to communication, resources, and experiences towards their daughter's success. Chapter ten highlights the discussion and conclusion of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The image of Black mothers in American society, even in the 21st century, still projects stereotypes. In today's culture and society, Black mothers are viewed as irrational, threatening, and combative Black women (Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1989; Johnson & Staples, 2005; Wallace, 1979). This is a broad erroneous generalization that researchers have acknowledged (Collins, 1990, 1994; Cooper, 2003, 2004, 2007; Ogbu & Fordham, 1986). However, even some research depicts the stereotypical view by stating that Black mothers are more of a liability to their children's educational development than an asset (Cooper, 2007).

There is limited literature that highlights the positive educational effect Black mothers have on their children's academic achievement (Cooper 2007). Beyond this "deficit thinking" about Black mothers, there are many dynamics that influence Black mothers face as they rear their children and provide a positive, loving, and educationally rich environment. As detailed in the previous chapter, one dynamic is parental involvement in promoting educational achievement, which can lead to college readiness. This is a cause for concern for Black parents because their children continue to lag behind their White counterparts. Interestingly, Black females have closed the achievement gap and outpaced their ethnic counterparts in educational attainment (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). For example, in the United States, women earn 67 percent of all Bachelor's degrees awarded to Blacks, compared to 61 percent for Hispanics and 57 percent for Whites (U.S. Department of Education 2004, 263).

Parenting can contribute to closing the achievement gap between Black and White children (Rouse, Brooks-Dunn & McLanahan, 2009). This study explores how Black mothers effectively encourage and navigate their daughter's educational experience to ensure educational success, while dealing with stereotypes and other sociocultural factors related to their lives.

This chapter is divided into two major parts. The first portion focuses on literature on the Black experience, the Black family, cultural roles of Black women, the culture of acting White, and the Black mother's standpoint. Examining this literature provides a better understanding how Black women live their daily lives and support their children. These key concepts provide important contextual background for the theory of motherwork.

The second portion of the chapter examines the relationship between motherwork and resilience. Motherwork is one of the few theoretical frameworks that examines Black mothering as a distinctive approach concerned with endurance, lack of power, and complex racial and ethnic identities (Collins, 1994). Resilience refers "to a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk" (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75). Resilience supports the concept of motherwork, which examines how Black mothers provide educational care for their children despite obstacles they face. Most of the research literature investigates resilience during childhood and adolescence (Masten & Reed, 2002). However, resilience is expanded in the context of adulthood using motherwork as a theoretical

concept. For example, research shows that Black mothers manage unique challenges while raising their children (Cooper, 2005) and must exercise resilience to successfully raise their children. The chapter concludes with a summary of literature.

The Black Experience

Race is a salient part of American life, and the field of education is not exempt. Race and class shape the nationwide crisis in urban education and unfortunately, racism continues to affect the schooling of children of color in negative ways. (Harding, 2005, p. 52)

The experience of Black parents today, specifically Black mothers, is that “middle-class White mothers continue to possess more racial and class privilege than most other types in public schools” (Cooper, 2009, p. 381). In the North and South, the Whites controlled the education of Blacks (Allen & Jewell, 1995). In the South, schools operated under the “separate, but equal” policy from the Supreme Court ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). As a result, the Black students were at a disadvantage in terms of educational materials, facilities, and funding. Some were without any schools and former slaves donated lumber and labor to help build their (Blacks) own schools (Anderson, 1988).

Even after the end of legal segregation, which began with *Brown v. Board of Education* in (1954), Black parents still struggle with teacher’s low expectation for their children (Edwards, 1993). Trent and Artiles (1993) illustrate the general experience Black mothers contend with in society:

When Black children entered integrated schools, they were met generally by White administrators and teachers who were unprepared to deal with their cognitive styles, social values, beliefs, customs, and traditions. Because of the discontinuity that developed overnight between home and school cultures, these personnel began teaching Black children with preconceived notions and stereotypical views about how they functioned. (p. 29)

Furthermore, Hacker (1992) asserts that racism still plays a critical role in the division between Whites and Black, “because Blacks are still marked by slavery” and sometimes seen as an “inferior species” (p. 14).

However, there is another historical side to the Black experience. There were a group of Blacks who were free prior to the Civil War whose status was between those of the Black elite and the masses (Butler, 1991). According to Puckrein (1984) “there has always been a negro elite of some kind” (p.77). Particular families have occupied upper-class status for numerous generations (Scottron, 1905). The negro elite is known as the small upper-class of Blacks that “came from the ranks of free people of color and privileged slaves” (Gatewood, 1988, p. 5). They view themselves as “superior to other Blacks in culture, sophistication, and achievement” (p. 5). These “other Blacks” were known as the masses. In addition, most of the Blacks in the upper class were light-skinned and on occasion engaged in “passing off as” White to avoid Jim Crow laws (Williams, 1904).

Gatewood (1988) explains that these upper-class Blacks were linked by the ties of kinship and represented a nationwide network of social and family relationships. For example:

They exchanged visits, toured Europe, and vacationed together at Harpers Ferry, Highland Beach in Maryland, the New Jersey coast, Saratoga, and Benton Harbor and Idlewild in Michigan. Debutante balls, weddings, and other important social events in one city attracted black aristocrats from the surrounding area and even distant places. (p. 8)

The Black upper-class also places great emphasis on education. Gatewood (1988) describes this importance:

The informal education of upper-class children began in the home where books, music, and art were an important part of everyday life, as was the close attention to rules of etiquette. If possible, their parents also provided exposure to art galleries, concerts, and the theater. Formal schooling in the liberal arts and in law, medicine, and other professions was common for the sons and daughters of caterers, barbers, civil servants, and others in elite occupations. It strengthened their claim to upper-class status. Upper-class children often prepared for college at private academies in New England or at several well-known public schools such as Dunbar in Washington. They then attended Howard, Fisk, Wilberforce, and other elite black institutions or white universities in the North.²⁸ Black graduates of Harvard University possessed their own informal alumni group that constituted an elite within the elite. (p. 10)

After World War I, the Black upper-class began to change. Racism began to increase and a decline in economic stability corroded the prestige and influence of the Black elite (Gatewood, 1988). A new cohort of successful Black professionals and politicians emerged that were well educated and engaged solely with the Black community (Gatewood, 1988). This new cohort formed their own elite status, which posed challenges to the old elite. The shift emphasized a closer identity with Black culture and transitioned away from assimilation (Spear, 1967). This brings to the forefront that there have been different experiences among Black people and families throughout history in America.

The Black Family

There is still comparison of Black families to White families, with implications that White families are the norm for making evaluations of standard family structures (Kane, 2000). Consequently, Cooper (2009) asserts that working class Black parents, remain bound to “a dichotomy that constructs them as lacking educational presence, values, and care when contrasted with White, middle-class parents who are constructed as being present, helpful, and caring” (p. 382). Researchers that are culturally aware realize there is no such thing as *the* Black family, but a variation among Black families like other segments of cultures in society (Kane, 2000). According to Boyd-Franklin (1989b), Hill (1972), and Nobles (1972) there are five important characteristics to the functioning of the Black family which are: (a) “extended family kinship networks, (b) egalitarian and adaptable family roles, (c) strong religious orientation, (d) strong education and work ethic, and flexible and strong coping skills” (Kane, 2000, p. 692).

Extended family networks exist in several structures in the Black family (Kane, 2000). First, there is a three-generation household (Kane, 2000). Billingsley (1968) and Sudarkasa (1993) describe fictive kin as the “familial relationship with people who are not related by blood and who may not live with the nuclear family” (Kane, 2000, p. 693). Friends and neighbors are usually sought for the fictive kin roles and are sometimes given kinship titles, such as aunt or uncle (Scott & Black, 1989). The overall perception among Black families is that they are very close (Rotheram-Borus &

Phinney, 1990) and suggests an ambience of warmth and nurturance in Black families (Boyd-Franklin, 1989b; Hill, 1972).

Egalitarian and adaptable family roles are generally used to describe male-female roles in Black families (Barbain, 1983; McAdoo, 1993; Willie & Reddick, 2010). Decisions and responsibilities are shared for financial support, the household, and child-care, according to abilities and opportunities rather than gender. Parenting roles can be shared with mothers and fathers in addition to grandparents, other relatives, fictive kin, and older siblings (Barbain, 1983; Boyd-Franklin, 1989b; Scott & Black, 1989). Jordan (1991) explains the development of self-reliance, independence, and responsibility is a common developmental task for Black females. According to Reddick and Willie (2010) the power-sharing family structure is a positive reflection of Black (and minority) populations that can be replicated by all families. In addition, they assert that the egalitarian structure emerged from the Black family is a “contribution by Black people to the ongoing process of family reform in United States” (p. 151).

Strong religious orientation, defined as the involvement in a church, is historically considered as an important institution central to the Black community (Barbain, 1983; Barnes, 1985; Boyd-Franklin, 1989b; Richardson, 1991). Dubois (1898) explains, “The church is the only social institution of Negroes which started in the African forest and survived slavery” (p. 6). Church provides a forum for self-expression, leadership, and emotional and material support. It is an extension of the Black family, the “quintessential kin network” (Scott & Black, 1989, p. 22). Hill (1972) asserts that the

Black church teaches values which support and uphold Black families in the face of hardship: mutual caring, shared responsibilities, and trust in a higher power, which overcomes evil.

Black parents tend to believe that education and work ethic are necessary traits for upward social mobility, given the historical societal barriers (Boyd-Franklin, 1989b; Coleman, 1986; Hill, 1972). They want their children to surpass them socioeconomically (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982). To encourage education and work ethic, Black parents teach their children shared family responsibilities, household and child-rearing tasks, encourage academic success, and to pursue career goals (Barnes, 1985; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982; Jordan, 1991).

Flexibility and coping skills with hardship are consistent with Black families (Barbain, 1983; Boyd-Franklin, 1989b). Barbain (1983), as cited in Kane (2000), points out the ability to cope is related to several factors:

Recognition of racism, which reduces self-blame; religious faith; flexibility of family roles; extended family structures; paradoxical control attributions (external locus of control accompanied by high levels of personal efficacy); and reliance on informal community support networks. (p. 695)

Kane (2000) suggests that the combination of the first four characteristics result in the fifth characteristic: coping skills. She also asserts that Black families view themselves as warm, nurturing, expressive, and supportive; however, there must be awareness of the variations among Black individuals and families and the roles they play.

Cultural Roles of Black Women

My mother used to say that the black woman is the white man's mule and the white woman is his dog. Now, she said that to say this: we do the heavy work and get beat whether we do it well or not. But the white woman is closer to the master and he pats them on the head and lets them sleep in the house, but he ain't gon' treat neither one like he was dealing with a person. (Waltney, 1980, p. 148)

Historical context. For many Black women, living in the United States can be a constant struggle (Smith & Stewart, 1983). The challenge is the continued devaluation of women, especially Black women who possess features of darker skin-tones, thick lips, broad noses, and kinky hair (Bond & Cash, 1992; Stevens, 1997). It is important to note that although advancements have been made, Black women continue to be faced with messages that disregard and mock them (Diller, 1999; Lawrence & Thelen, 1995). The debate continues between the White perspective of Black motherhood and efforts by Black women to describe their own experiences on motherhood (Collins, 1987). Collins suggests that White perspectives on motherhood challenge Black and non-White mothers. Collins' assumptions are:

1. Mothering occurs within a nuclear family household where the mother has the sole responsibility of childrearing.
2. Strict sex roles exist, which define male and female roles in the family household.
3. Motherhood and economic reliance on men are interpreted as a "good" mother stays at home, making motherhood a full-time job.

In addition, White perspectives on Black mothers revolve around two co-dependent images that define a Black mother's role in White and Black families (Collins, 1987).

The first image centers on the term Mammy:

Mammy is the faithful, devoted domestic servant. Like one of the family, Mammy conscientiously "mothers" her White children caring for them and loving them as if they were her own. Mammy is the ideal Black mother for she recognizes her place. She is paid next to nothing and yet cheerfully accepts her inferior status. But when she enters her own home this same Mammy is transformed into the second Image, the "too-strong" matriarch who raises weak sons and "unnaturally superior" daughters. (p. 4)

The second image of a matriarch is the view of the mother in the Black family:

She's the too-strong matriarch who raises weak sons and "unnaturally superior" daughters. When she protests, she is labeled aggressive and non-feminine, yet if she remains silent, she is rendered invisible. (p. 4)

Previous research highlighted that the White definitions of Black mothers exploit Black women by blaming them for their own reactions to subordination (King, 1973). King uses the example of stay-at-home mothers. The stay-at-home mother is seen as the ideal for families, yet Black women have been obligated to work outside the home, usually in domestic professions. Working outside the home may cause other adults to help with childcare for the working mother. However, in a study conducted by Reddick and Willie (2010) examining the myth of the Black matriarch concluded that middle class and working class Black families tended to be egalitarian. This data refutes and challenges the common definition of the Black matriarch- the domineering Black mother (Reddick and Willie, 2010). Furthermore, there are other definitions for mothering on Black communities.

Bloodmothers, othermothers, and women-centered networks. In Black communities, the role of the bloodmother and othermother are interchangeable at times (Collins, 1987). Collins emphasizes that bloodmothers are expected to raise and care for their children, but in the Black community, it is culturally accepted that one person with mothering duties may not be possible. Thus, the popular term “it takes a village to raise a child” is used in the Black community. Othermothers, who assist bloodmothers with the distribution of mothering responsibilities, are central to Black motherhood (Troester, 1984).

In addition, the extended networks of Black families are well known (Aschenbrenner, 1975; Martin & Martin, 1978; Mcray, 1980; Stack, 1974). Collins suggests, “organized, resilient, women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers are critical to understanding this extended network” (p. 5). In these communities, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins are othermothers by acting as childcare providers for each other’s children. If needed, these childcare arrangements can be turned into long-term care or informal adoption (Martin & Martin, 1978).

Cantarow (1980) illustrates informal adoption by othermothers:

My aunt who had thirteen children of her own raised three more. She had become a midwife, and a child was born who was covered in sores. Nobody particularly wanted the child, so she took the child and raised him...and another mother decided she didn’t want to be bothered with two children. So my aunt took one and raised him...they were part of the family. (p. 59)

Whether bloodmother or othermother, motherhood plays a substantial role in the development of Black communities and relationships in the United States.

Black mother/daughter relationships. There are at least two approaches to understanding Black mother/daughter relationships (Reid, 1982). The first considers the role of parents in the daughter's personal and social behavior. This view highlights how motherhood is realized through a Black mother's actions as a role model. The second approach, suggests the rewards and reprimands attached to a girl's childhood experiences that shape the women's sex-role behavior. This looks at experiences of Black girls as they grow up that encourage them to absorb Black motherhood (Reid, 1982).

Turnage (2004) discusses the Black adolescent's relationship with her mother and her sense of ethnic identity on the global self-esteem of Black female adolescents. Self-esteem is described in this discussion as the global attitude about the adolescent, including her perspective of how capable, worthwhile, and successful she feels as a person (Joseph, 1994; Rosenberg, 1965). Global self-esteem has two components (Carlock, 1999; Swann, 1996). The first component describes a person who feels loveable and is able to say to self and others, "I am loved as I am," and "there are people in my life who believe I am special." The second component involves the person believing she is competent (Carlock, 1999).

Presently, there are various self-esteem enhancing thoughts and methods that Black women can employ (Turnage, 2004). These include practices Black parents can use to help their children understand and accept differences in skin color (Church, 1993) and the vital role of Blacks in history (Easton, 1994). These practices support the

important role Black mothers play in developing their daughters' global self-esteem (Greene, 1990a; Hammer, 1974; Plummer, 1995). Majors and Billson (1992) describe the distinctive role of Black parents as teaching "values emphasizing cooperation, mutual respect, commitment, and love of family, race, community, and nation" (pp. 110-111). Since Black mothers are often the only parent in the household, they can help their daughter face the negative messages that are often directed at Black females (Turnage, 2004). This allows the Black mother to serve as a mechanism of growth and a role model as she trains her daughter to address the harm that can result when Black features are devalued and mocked (Sanders Thompson, 1994; Scott, 1991).

Black mothers as role models. Girls establish feminine identities by embracing the femininity of their mothers (Collins, 1987). This identity forms a connection, which is incorporated into the girl's female personality. She points out that Black girls learn to identify differently than White, middle-class girls. Thus, working mothers and extended family othermothers offer a variety of role models, which confront the trend of motherhood.

Furthermore, Black mothers face the dilemma of ensuring their daughters physical survival and to fit into systems of oppression (Collins, 1987). Black mothers expect their daughters to work and get an education, so the daughters can support themselves and anticipate bearing the responsibilities in their families because these skills are crucial for their own survival (Joseph, 1981; Meyers, 1980).

Mothers illustrate various combinations of traits dedicated to guaranteeing their daughters achieve more than they have. With the support of othermothers and Black women-centered networks, Black girls are able to identify with Black motherhood, which also leads to a sense of empowerment for Black girls (Collins, 1987).

Another role Black mothers play is to help their daughters develop high self-esteem (Turnage, 2004). For many Black women, the birth of a daughter can cause old wounds to resurface (Stevens, 1997). These wounds stem from negative societal messages the Black mothers have experienced. The experience of these scars motivates the Black mothers to protect their daughters from experiencing the same scars, by training their daughters to cultivate self-esteem (Turnage, 2004).

Many scholars echo the positive impact Black mothers have on enhancing their daughters' self-esteem (Lawrence & Thelen, 1995; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Richman, Clark, & Brown, 1985; Tashakkori, 1993; Wade, Thompson, Tashakkori, & Valente, 1989). In addition, Black females achieve higher global self-esteem levels than White females of the same age, socioeconomic background, and academic performance level (Hare, 1980, 1985; Lawrence & Thelen, 1995; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Richman, Clark, & Brown 1985; Tashakkori, 1993). In this society, Black mothers strive to provide images of womanhood that Black daughters can attain. For example, Turnage (2004) highlights that Black mothers teach their daughters:

not to internalize non-Black views of womanhood, beauty, and achievement. By providing the African American female positive and obtainable images of womanhood, an African American mother helps her daughter translate external

stimuli into manageable pieces. As she translates these stimuli, she also develops strategies to avert its effect upon her daughter's global self-esteem. (p. 158)

Behavioral roles of Black mothers. There is a need for understanding Black mothers balancing the physical survival of their daughters and empowering them to confront boundaries, to counteract against contradictions of Black mother/daughter relationships (Collins, 1987). Scholars describe Black mothers as strong disciplinarians and overly protective parents; yet these Black mothers manage to raise daughters who are self-reliant and confident (Joseph, 1980; Meyers, 1980). Professor Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984) suggests Black mothers:

do not socialize their daughters to be "passive" or "irrational." Quite the contrary, they socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self-confident. Black mothers are suffocatingly protective and domineering precisely because they are determined to mold their daughters into whole and self-actualizing persons in a society that devalues Black women. (p. 12)

Collins (1987) explains that Black mothers stress protection by trying to guard their daughters as long as they can from consequences attached to their race, class, and gender position by teaching them to protect themselves in certain situations. The positive messages that are instilled by Black mothers help their daughters develop positive images of themselves and what it means to be Black and female (Bell-Scott et al., 1993; Greene 1990a, b). The explanations and support Black mothers share with their daughters minimize confusion and uninformed decision-making during the developmental period of their lives (Townsend & Worobey, 1987). A Black mother

might teach her daughter she is just Black or just a female (Lykes, 1983). The daughter learns that she is both Black and a female and learns not to separate the two.

Hence, when Black mothers express positive messages of womanhood to empower their daughters, mothers do not separate their daughters' ethnicity and gender because that type of separation would deny the daughters' intersectionality of being Black and female. She also mentions that Black mothers' efforts to provide for their children can also affect the emotional intensity of Black mother/daughter relationships. In addition, for Black mothers, "the demands of providing for children are so demanding that affection must often wait until the basic needs of physical survival are satisfied" (p. 8). Joseph (1980) reveals that Black daughters raised by mothers wrestling with unreceptive environments have to face their feelings about the difference between the maternal love, which exists in popular culture and the strict, firm mothers so central to their lives.

For Black daughters, growing up means developing an understanding of their mothers that physical care and protection are acts of motherly love (Collins, 1987). She also expresses othermothers play a vital role in neutralizing the emotional intensity of the mother/daughter relationship to help Black daughters understand the ideology of Black motherhood. For example, Weems (1984) describes that women teachers, neighbors, friends, and othermothers helped her negotiate her difficult mother/daughter relationship. She explains, those women "did not have the onus of providing for me, and so had the luxury of talking to me" (p. 27).

Additionally, Jordan (1985) offers an articulate analysis of a daughter's comprehension of the personal cost Black mothers have paid in working to bestow an economic and emotional foundation for their Black children:

As a child I noticed the sadness of mother as she sat alone in the kitchen at night...Her woman's work never won permanent victories of any kind. It never enlarged the universe of her imagination or her power to influence what happened beyond the front door of our house. Her woman's work never tickled her to laugh or shout or dance. But she did raise me to respect her way of offering her love and to believe that hard work is often the irreducible factor for survival, not something to avoid. Her woman's work produced a reliable home base where I could pursue the privileges of books and music. Her woman's work invented the potential for a completely different kind of work for us, the next generation of Black women: huge, rewarding hard work demanded by the huge, new ambitions that her perfect confidence in us engendered. (p. 145)

In concluding remarks, these words speak to the essence of Black motherhood, which is central to the well being of numerous Black women. The daughter trusts that her mother has prepared her to deal with life (Turnage, 2004). The daughter knows that her mother is willing and able to help her recharge the trust that developed in early childhood (Turnage, 2004). The accessibility of Black mothers sustains the daughter in knowing that "someone loves, respects, and takes care of her unconditionally" (p. 159). These important practices of Black mothers provide on the job training for their daughters as they enter Black womanhood (Turnage, 2004). This research literature also noted its focus on problems rather than resilience or strengths of these Black mothers (Turnage, 2004). As with the behavioral roles of Black mothers, some also experience the culture of acting White while their children are in school.

Culture of Acting White

She (my child) has to go to school and look and talk like they do there. She has to leave and go over to an environment like First AME (African Methodist Episcopal Church), where kids talk a different kind of English. Not better or worse, but different-and you know how difficult it is for kids to fit in... And the stress- its stressful. It's a difference, a real difference of vocabulary, it's a difference of standards. It's culturally night and day. (Horvat & Antonio, 1999, p. 334)

In a like manner, Collins (1994) indicates Black mothers approach parenting with concerns about racial and ethnic identities of their children as indicated in the quotation above. For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison (1970) tells the story of Pecola, an 11-year-old Black girl who wants to have blue eyes, because she sees herself as ugly. The White child actress, Shirley Temple, who has the desired blue eyes, represents the standard of beauty to which Pecola subscribes:

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. (p. 46)

With this in mind, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) highlight that existing environmental conditions have led Black parents to teach their children a double message: “you must be twice as good to go half as far” and “don’t get the big head, don’t blow your own horn” (p. 177). Generations of Black children have been taught these messages so intricately; they serve as a cultural orientation of what it means to attain academic success and “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). They point out that Black students are mediocre in school because “they experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success” (p. 177).

This reasoning of Black students came from the perception that White America has refused to admit that Black Americans have intellectual capability. Thus, Black Americans began to doubt their intellectual capability, and began to define academic success as a White privilege, and began to discourage themselves from emulating White people who are academically successful (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). They assert that within their environmental structure, “Black Americans have been provided with substandard schooling, based on White American’s perception of the educational needs of Black Americans and White Americans have controlled Black American’s education” (pp. 178-179). Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts that many equate excellent performance in school with a loss of African American identity, which translates as; doing well in school is seen as “acting White.”

As a result of the subpar schooling and other obstacles as adults, Black Americans tend to develop “survival strategies” and other coping methods (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Some examples of survival strategies are the collective struggle, “Uncle Tomming,” and hustling. In a similar vein, the status mobility system is a concept, which provides understanding academic attitudes and behaviors of Black Americans dealing with “acting White” (LeVine, 1967; Ogbu, 1978). Fordham and Ogbu define the status mobility system as a “socially and culturally approved strategy for getting ahead within a given population or given society” (p. 179). Fordham and Ogbu highlight another factor, which makes the relationship between Blacks and Whites uniquely different from other ethnic groups: oppositional social identity. For example, Blacks

tend to develop a sense of oppositional social identity because of the way Whites have treated them economically, politically, socially, and psychologically (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The authors give further explanation:

The oppositional identity of the minority evolves also because they perceive and experience the treatment by whites as collective and enduring oppression. They realize and believe that, regardless of their individual ability and training or education, and regardless of their place of origin (e.g., in Africa) or residence in America, regardless of their individual economic status or physical appearance, they cannot expect to be treated like white Americans, their "fellow citizens"; nor can they easily escape from their more or less birth-ascribed membership in a subordinate and disparaged group by "passing" or by returning to "a homeland." (p. 181)

In conclusion, Fordham and Ogbu believe the problems of Black children are not only from limited prospects, but also from attempting to cope with the burden of "acting White." They recognize the role external factors play in establishing academic issues of Black students, however, how Black students respond to other Black students who are striving for academic success is equally important. Further, the learning environment created by the burden of acting White should be acknowledged and implemented into educational policies and remediation efforts (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

A study was completed that examined the experiences and ambitions of Black girls at an independent day school in California (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). The focus of this qualitative study was the interaction between the Black girls and the school's organizational and cultural context. The researchers suggested these Black girls would "pay a price for the promise of social mobility through their attendance at this elite,

predominantly White, college preparatory school” (p. 318). Horvat and Antonio explain this price is manifested in the pain and anguish they endure by living out their lives as outsiders within the race- and class-defined dominant habitus of the school organization.

According to (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) habitus is “a fluid and constantly reformulated set of dispositions that are created through personal and social history and thus influence how the world is constructed around us” (p. 319). The specific focus in this study was how these Black girls learn or relearn their status as Blacks in a White world. In addition, a major outcome was noted: the development of particular coping strategies for navigating as an underrepresented group in our society (Horvat & Antonio, 1999).

The researchers described the school as White, wealthy, and marked by a sense of entitlement. This atmosphere highlights the various groups divided by race and socioeconomical backgrounds and the perception of which group has power in the school setting. One of the Black seniors from the study described her experience as sustaining friendships with her Black friends, meeting academic challenges in the classroom, and having constant reminders of her racial status inside and outside the classroom. She notes an instance involving an English teacher:

One of the Korean girls in the class asked if you could ever have a verb before a noun in a sentence, and [the teacher] said, "Ran she down the street, now that sounds like I just stepped off a Chinese boat." And nobody said anything.... We were reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, about the mulatto woman, and one of the White girls, obviously oblivious to everything else, [said,] "How come all Black people don't have long, flowing, gorgeous hair

like hers?" ...And instead of his response being, "Because she's mulatto and she's part...", no, [he said,] I don't know[,] "Most black people's hair is like frizzy and gnarly and stuff." (p. 328)

There is also discussion of the price the Black girls pay for attending the school (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). The overriding theme from these girls was the extreme pain each felt of not belonging to this environment and being excluded from the organizational habitus of the school. The authors describe the organizational habitus as an environment

that has been developed over time by the dominant players in the school community-a group consisting of White, wealthy families that historically has exercised great control over the development of the school and continues to participate most forcefully and powerfully in its governance. (p. 327)

For example, three girls cried in their interviews with the researchers when speaking about their challenges to fit into this White and wealthy school. However, these Black girls reaped benefits as well. Among the Black parents, social navigation through a White world is a recognized skill and is accepted as a mirror to the "real world" which will prepare these Black girls with life skills for the future (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). One Black mother stated, "it's still that way in the world, so my daughter has learned to adapt to the environment as it's going to be as her life goes on" (p. 337).

In summary, Horvat and Antonio identify the combined effects of race and class. They note that these Black girls learned how to fit in this White, upper-class school by changing their speech, their attire, and their looks to move into that world while trying to balance two Black and White social worlds. Next, the researchers assert

these Black girls paid a price by attending the school to purchase the promise of social mobility. Finally, the researchers were reminded that more must be done to counteract the price required for Black people to attain the promise of opportunity. Horvat and Antonio agree with Fordham and Ogbu (1986) that there is stress in terms of “acting White,” on the other hand Horvat and Antonio believe there are some benefits associated with social mobility for these Black girls despite the stress.

Equally important, Horvat and Lewis (2003) build on the idea of “acting White” introduced by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) by adding the concept that students can maintain their Black identity while achieving academically. Some scholars question the theory of “acting White” and defining academic success as the White privilege (Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Hemming, 1996; O’Connor, 1997). Based on their ethnographic study, Horvat and Lewis examine data for evidence of “acting White” as a significant factor in the academic success and school experience of Black female high school seniors. The data revealed these Black females both camouflaged and shared their academic achievements. Fordham and Ogbu define camouflaging as instances of students who modify or downplay their academic success among Black peers. In addition, the students in the study acted differently with different groups of peers (Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

The “acting White” argument suggests that Black students are academically successful at the price of being labeled as “acting White” and excluded from their Black peers (Horvat & Lewis, 2003). They argue this lens cannot generalize the school experience for all Black students. Instead they suggest the Black females “manage” their

academic success, which includes camouflaging activities and sharing successes as well. Managing is described as the student's ability to make modifications of activities as an asset. Sharing is described as "the candid divulge[ing] of academic activities, achievements, and aspirations with supportive peers" (p. 271). Interestingly, the Black females had strong racial identity as young Black women. For instance, the Black girls maintained strong friendships with their Black peers and all students interviewed wanted to remain connected to the Black community (Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

In summary, Horvat and Lewis reveal that these Black students manage their academic success, while displaying the possibility of having a positive racial identity in which academic achievement and goals do not conflict or compete with being authentically Black. Furthermore, they highlight being Black and smart is not unique among Black students, which disagrees with the notion of Fordham and Ogbu that "acting White" is a significant factor in the Black achievement gap. Horvat and Lewis implore researchers to further investigate Black peer groups to understand the achievement gap more, as this issue remains very important to educational research.

As a consequence, Ogbu (2004) published an article to address critics who have misinterpreted the theory of oppositional collective identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). He sought to clarify oppositional culture among Black Americans and discuss the Black experience of "acting White" in the United States. He also highlights the Black student experience with the burden of "acting White." Ogbu's argument with current research is the failure to differentiate between the three perspectives of collective identity, cultural

frame of reference, and schooling of Black adolescents. He cited (2004) that this failure gives critics a different study from his joint article with Fordham. Equally, Ogbu asserts that critics have focused on interactions between students and their school, ignoring “the historical and community contexts of Black student behavior” (p. 2).

Collective identity is defined as “people’s sense of who they are, their “we-feeling” or “belong” (p. 3). This identity develops because of people’s collective experiences. The collective identity of an oppressed underrepresented group, specifically Blacks, is created and sustained by two factors: status problems and response to status problems (Ogbu, 2004). Status problems are external forces that make a group of people distinct from the rest of the population. For Blacks, enslavement serves as an example of a status problem (Ogbu, 2004). In regard to the response of the underrepresented groups, they experience anger for historical mistreatment and oppression.

The “cultural frame of reference” is a term that refers to the correct way of behaving from the perspective of the underrepresented group. Ogbu claims that all members of the underrepresented groups do not respond in opposition to the dominant culture. He agrees with Horvat and Lewis (2003) that some people from underrepresented groups, specifically Blacks, behave like the dominant group to achieve social mobility.

Ogbu (2004) concludes with the notion that Black students face the burden of “acting White” that Black Americans still face in the United States. Second, he asserts Blacks have developed strategies to cope with “acting White” with their peers and the

Black community. Third, students can experience peer pressure without “acting White.” Finally, he acknowledges that societal, school, and other community forces are important contributors to the Black achievement gap (Ogbu, 2002, 2003; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

However, there is a growing body of literature that challenges the Ogbu-Fordham analysis and gives an alternate perspective of understanding the relationship of racial identity and student achievement. According to Carter (2005) some Black students have strong racial pride and take on a prove-them-wrong attitude in the classroom. In addition Robert Sellers and his colleagues (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998), highlight that some students of color are able to acquire academic success and maintain a strong racial heritage within the school setting. This behavior is described as “accommodation without assimilation” (Gibson, 1988).

Moreover, some Black students who truly believe education is a path to upward mobility are able to navigate between their primary culture and dominant culture (Carter, 2008). Prudence Carter (2005) calls these students “cultural straddlers” and describes them as “having bicultural perspectives; they are strategic movers across cultural spheres” (p. 30). Carter (2008) sums up this alternative perspective by asserting the difference between Black achievers and Black students is that Black achievers do not view student success as “acting White; (Ogbu & Fordham, 1986). Instead Black achievers embrace the idea that school achievement is a “raceless human trait that can be pursued by individuals of any racial or ethnic group” (Carter, 2008, p. 470).

Black Mothers' Standpoint

I dread to see my children grow, I know not their fate. Where the white boy has every opportunity and protection, mine will have few opportunities and no protection. It does not matter how good or wise my children maybe, they are colored. (anonymous Black mother in 1904 quoted from; Lerner, 1972, p. 158)

The feminist standpoint theory suggests that researchers who examine women put their lives at the center of investigation in order to gain a better understanding of women and how environmental structures influence their lives and experiences (Cooper, 2003). Cooper suggests researchers gain information about a woman's standpoint by exploring her collective insights shared through experiences. Collins (1989) argues that Black women have a self-prescribed perspective of their oppression. She further explains two interconnected mechanisms, which provide understanding of this view:

First, Black women's political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups. The unpaid and paid work that Black women perform, the types of communities in which they live, and the kinds of relationships they have with others suggest that African-American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and female. Second, these experiences stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality. In brief, a subordinate group not only experiences a different reality than a group that rules, but a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than a dominant group. (pp. 747-748)

Thus, the dominant group often discredits standpoints of oppressed groups, specifically Black mothers, because this can trigger the oppressed group to resist their domination (Collins, 1989). The standpoint of Black women is based on how oppression, a culturally pertinent value system, and the need for change can outline how

Black women direct their personal lives (Collins, 1990, 1994, 1998). While some may confuse Black women's standpoint and Black feminist thought, Berger and Luckmann (1966) give clarity to the perspectives. They claim Black women's standpoint deals with everyday, general knowledge shared by members of a group such as Black mothers.

Positionality is another term that is interchangeable with standpoint. Positionality describes how one is socially located in relation to others given background factors such as race, class, and gender (Martin & VanGunten, 2002; Maher & Tetreault, 1993). On the other hand, Black feminist thought is an extension of that knowledge provided by experts who are part of the group (Black) and have the view as the group's standpoint. For example, parental involvement seems to favor White, middle-class families, while perspectives of Black parental involvement are portrayed negatively (Gavin & Greenfield, 1998).

In addition, teachers frequently identify Black parents as unengaged and unconcerned with their children's education (Chavkin, 1993). These consistent negative opinions disregard the historical images of Black parents (Fields-Smith, 2005). For instance, in the slavery era Black parents demonstrated educational care when slaves would risk their lives to learn to read because they associated freedom with literacy (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995).

Politically, single motherhood is heavily debated over Black mother-only families dating back to the 1960s (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). According to the Moynihan Report (1965) Black single mothers were cited as evidence of the growing

pathology in the Black family as a crucial link to the transmission of poverty. This characterization reinforces a negative stereotypical perspective about their lives and values (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Reddick & Willie, 2010).

Fourteen Black mothers were part of a qualitative study (Cooper, 2005) to examine their standpoint and educational views. During the study, Cooper investigated the similarities of the educational experience, parenting goals, and responsibilities these Black women shared. Parents need the ability to seek out educational opportunities for their children based on being resourceful and informed (Cooper, 2005a; Henig, 1994; Wells, 1993).

The qualitative methods used in the study allowed the mothers to describe how they provide meaning of their educational views, choices, and experiences, and how these are shaped by socioeconomic and cultural factors (Cooper, 2007). This clarified how these Black mothers use these strategies to empower themselves. The various quotations in the study expressed the hopes and fears these Black mothers have for their children, which provided understanding about how these women create their parenting and advocacy roles.

The author revealed that these Black mothers use their standpoint with the factors of race, class, and gender to make decisions regarding the education of their children. The majority of mothers in the study explained they are passionate about choosing good schools for their children, because academic achievement can help their “children to become independent; compete against more affluent peers; protect and

defend themselves in a racist society; [and] have more prosperous life options than they themselves had” (Cooper, 2005, p. 179).

These themes reflect their standpoints as mothers, and the challenges in which they attribute to race, class, and gender (Cooper, 2005). Furthermore, Black mother school choices are constructed based on culturally relevant factors and concern for their children’s emotional welfare and their interest in their children’s academic achievement (Cooper, 2005).

Education means survival. According to Cooper (2003), “educational attainment is a ‘weapon’ African-American children need in order to thrive in an unjust world” (p. 110). Historically in the United States, public schools have offered Black children inferior educational opportunities compared to White children (Allen & Jewel, 1995; Anderson, 1988; Barnes, 1997; Edwards, 1993; Field-Smith, 2005; Noguera, 2004, 2001). These educational inequalities in schools can cause difficulties for their children to have the quality education needed to achieve success (Cooper, 2007). Black parents have struggled for voice, power, and accountability in the United States public educational system in order to gain access, desegregation, equal funding, or local control (Allen & Jewel, 1995; Anderson, 1988; Barnes, 1997; Cooper, 2005a; Edwards, 1993; Fields-Smith, 2005; Levin, 1972; Noguera, 2001; Shujaa, 1992).

Many Black parents perceive education as a path to liberation (Allen & Jewel, 1995; Anderson, 1988). Anderson suggests that Blacks view schooling as an instrument to gain independence and validity, along with social mobility. In addition, Black families

have pursued education to escape poverty and achieve goals (Cooper, 2007). In the qualitative study by Cooper (2005) mentioned above, Black mothers regard education as a tool for their children “to become financially independent, compete against more affluent peers, defend themselves in a racist society, and to have greater life options” (p. 179).

In this study, mothers specify that being successful in education can make or break their children’s future. For example, Black mothers felt that concentrating on education would distract their daughters from having babies before they are ready to provide for themselves. Black mothers stress their desire to ensure that their kids do well and confront fewer barriers than they have encountered. The mothers also asserted that quality schooling for their children was an attempt to make sure their children gained knowledge and qualifications to be successful in society (Cooper, 2003). Major concerns of these mothers about schooling are “low rates of student learning, poor facilities, safety and discipline problems, and disinterested administrators” (p. 499).

School choice. According to Cooper (2005) Black parents from low-income or working class families are perceived to be active choosers or non-choosers (Fuller & Elmore, 1996). Cooper (2005) defines school choice as how Black mothers choose schools for their children based on their own experiences in public schools, educational goals for their children, and their view about their school choice options. Based on this perception, it is assumed the Black parents place less emphasis on academic factors when choosing schools because they lack the knowledge to make good educational

choices (Cookson, 1992; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Henig, 1996; Moe, 1995). This assumption does not acknowledge that Black parents may choose schools that are legitimate to the needs of their families (Cooper, 2005).

In the qualitative study by Cooper (2007), Black mothers describe quality schools as the ones “that offer small classroom sizes, personable teachers, safety, discipline, and/or culturally affirming curriculum and settings” (p. 500). When faced with schools overcrowding, high teacher turnover, and declining academic performance, opposite survival in society and the high stakes of a good education, these mothers are motivated to explore their school choice options. Cooper (2005) suggests a Black mother’s school choice for her children is built around culturally relevant factors, concern for their wellbeing, and their interest in their children’s academic success. In addition, mothers explained they were willing to sacrifice what is necessary to obtain quality education for their children.

Since Black mothers value education, they are often faced with the consideration about placing their children in public or private schools (Cooper, 2005). In terms of a stable environment, the mothers consider several factors of quality schools such as a challenging curriculum, special needs accommodation, culturally relevant teaching, and being well rounded. The mothers did not factor in standardized testing and ranking, which counters other literature that affluent White parents place their children based on student success data in their school choice process (Holme, 2002).

A Black mother’s care. Cooper (2009) asserts a Black woman’s care includes

warmth, nurturing, love, protection, and political resistance. Therefore, caring can be defined as seeking justice as well. She explains these assumptions are significant when considering educational care and participation of Black mothers (Cooper, 2009). In her qualitative studies, Cooper (2007, 2005, 2003) expresses that Black mothers demonstrate that educational care can be culturally relevant, gendered, and supporting. The collection of data confirmed Black women display care in a distinctive way, which “means promoting cultural integrity, communal and individual survival, spiritual growth, and political change under oppressive conditions” (Thompson, 2004, p. 29).

The narratives told by these Black mothers revealed that they recognized the education of their children could be the difference between them thriving in life or “slinging drugs,” “dodging bullets,” and “having a bunch of babies” (Cooper, 2007, p. 499). Cooper asserts Black mothers feel the need to stay on guard “to ensure that educational inequality does not undermine their children’s life chances so they advocate for their children in their daily life” (p. 504). Therefore, Black mothers “strive to be their children’s ‘voice,’ to ‘follow’ their kids where they go, to have a ‘visible presence’ in schools, and ‘keep close tabs’ on teachers” (p. 504).

In summary, Cooper (2005) emphasizes the Black mother’s main mission was securing equal education for their children in schools to achieve academic success. These Black mothers work hard to gain the power, resources, and educational opportunities their children need to have social mobility in society. Cooper notes these findings are not the voice of all Black mothers; however, the data offers valuable insight

on how a mother's standpoint impacts her views and school choices for her children (Cooper, 2005). Next, the author introduces the framework of "motherwork" and why it can serve as an important link in understanding how Black mothers may use resiliency traits in their adulthood as they educate their children. Dr. Camille Cooper and Dr. Patricia Collins are the leading scholars of motherwork for women of color.

Motherwork

The theoretical framework of motherwork is a distinct way of researching Black mothers in a way that addresses race, class, and gender variables and the relation to the education of their children. Collins (1994) explains motherwork as the idea that race, class, and gender are interlocking aspects of Black women's identity, meaning-making, and mothering. McMahon (1995) suggests that one's experience with mothering can vary based on ethnicity.

According to Collins (1994), Black mothers, unlike White mothers, must negotiate racist social contexts while fighting for the physical survival of their children; struggling to balance child-rearing with work completed outside the home; while reconciling their maternal instinct with the powerless position they hold in a White society. Some Black feminists indicate Black women draw on a set of shared values and a common heritage to create their mothering role (Collins, 1990; Dove, 1998; Ladner, 1998). The mother's balance between the cultural resistance explained above and the empowering of their children encompasses "motherwork" (Collins, 1994). Cooper (2007) gives three mechanisms of "motherwork" which include; (a) ensuring the child's

physical and emotional survival; (b) empowering the child's life outcomes; and (c) nurturing the child's racial identity in a positive manner. Cooper (2007) describes "motherwork":

The motherwork of women of color, is anchored in specific, racialized concepts of survival, power and identity. These mothers' quest to acquire each of these things is linked to their experience with oppression and their desire to ensure that their children can prosper in a racist society. (p. 494)

For example, a Black mother's instinct of survival is grounded in the consciousness that American society still devalues the worth, intellectual ability, and social contribution of Black people. In addition, political and criminal justice systems unequally penalize Black people (Cooper, 2007). In a similar vein, power is critical to Black mothers because Black mothers believe it is a maternal duty to empower their children, despite historical inequality practices in American society (Cooper, 2007). When Black mothers realize their position as a marginalized group they are convinced to foster positive racial identities for their children for their own mental and emotional welfare as well as the child's identity and self-esteem (Cooper, 2007). Collins explains the importance of racial identity:

Racial ethnic women's motherwork reflects the tensions inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color. The racial privilege enjoyed by white, middle-class women makes unnecessary this complicated dimension of the mothering tradition of women of color. (1994, p. 57)

The concept of motherwork for Black mothers, as illustrated by Collins (1994), refutes theories, which devalue and misinform educators of what motherwork truly

means to a Black mother. A majority of theories forecast Black families as having the propensity to be linked to crime, social deviancy, and poor family values (Gehlbach, 1966; Mincy, 1994; Persell, 1991; U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). However, the Black feminist conception of motherwork provides clarity in a scholarly format which contextualizes the function, interests, needs, and strength of Black women and mothers while emphasizing power, viewpoint, and social agency (Collins, 1990, 1998; Guy-Sheftall, 2001; hooks, 2000; Ladner, 1998; Lorde, 1984; Thompson, 1998; Walker, 1983).

Resilience Research

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, resilience is used to support the concept of motherwork. Resilience refers “to a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75).

Constructs, identifiers, and predictors. Over the past three decades, scholars have worked to refine the definition of resilience to provide clarity across social science disciplines. With resilience there are two constructs: adversity and positive adaptation (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 1999; Rutter, 1999, 2000). *Adversity* is negative life circumstances, which are associated with exposure to a threat or adjustment difficulties. *Positive adaptation* is the achievement of success despite negative circumstances in the developmental process (Garmezy, 1990; Luther & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). In

addition, Masten and Read (2002) examine two observations that serve as identifiers for resilience. The first observation is individuals thrive at or above the norm in relation to expected behaviors in patterns of positive adaptation. The second identifier requires justifiable circumstances, which pose danger to positive outcomes in patterns of positive adaptation (Masten & Reed, 2002). Furthermore, Masten and Reed (2002) highlight there is still some debate over the definition of resilience but most findings in the literature arrive at the “same conclusion with compelling consistency” (p. 75).

In addition, Kumpfer (1999) asserts there are six predictors of resilience: (a) stressors or challenges; (b) the external environmental context; (c) person-environment interactional process; (d) internal self-characteristics; (e) resilience process; and (f) positive outcomes or adaptation. *Stressors or challenges* are stimuli that activate the resilience process and create disruption in the stable environment of the individual or their family, group, or community being studied. *External environmental context* is the balance and interaction of significant risk and protective factors and processes in the individual’s external environment in the domains of influence through family, community, and culture. *Person-environment interactional process* is the interactive process between the individual and his or her environment as the individual or others attempt to interpret and overcome challenges or intricate environments to build more protective environments. *Internal self-characteristics* are spiritual, cognitive, social, physical, and emotional strengths needed for the individual to be successful on different developmental tasks, diverse cultures, and various environments. *Resilience process* are

short-term or long-term stress/coping processes learned by the individual by steady exposure to intensifying challenges and stressors that allow that individual to recover with resilient reintegration (Richardson, Nieger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990). *Positive outcomes or adaptation* refer to certain developmental tasks that support later positive adaptation in new tasks resulting in a higher probability of reaching a universal designation in adulthood as a resilient adult (Kumpfer, 1999). Retrospective research designs are usually used for adults, which include small sample sizes using qualitative, in-depth interviews of successful adults who “made it despite the odds” (Gordon & Song, 1993).

Protective factors. Previous research highlights evidence that children and adults can overcome life’s struggles (Garmezy, 1991). When this happens, Garmezy addresses the importance of identifying which “protective factors” enable people to avoid life’s stresses, but he indicates that little is still known about those who overcome the cycles of disadvantage. Garmezy defines protective factors as factors that “enable individuals to circumvent life stressors” (p. 421). Garmezy also suggests that some variables contribute to the “protective factors” in stressful life situations, which are: (a) variables found in families in poverty that are marked by warmth, cohesion, and the presence of a caring adult (i.e., grandparent) in place of a parent; and (b) external support from a teacher or church in the community. Finally, he stresses the importance of researching these protective mechanisms in future studies.

In a similar vein, Werner and Smith (1982) researched resiliency in Hawaii. This longitudinal study examined infants of Kauai born into poverty and followed the infants for approximately four decades into mid-life. The infants were born into poverty with biological stress and family instability. Constant exposures to these factors of stress increased their risk level for failure. However, a group of these infants emerged as competent and self-sufficient individuals as adults. Werner and her colleagues studied how these unexpected outcomes occurred.

The data revealed protective factors in certain families. The children experienced positive relationships with parents who; (a) were supportive, (b) set rules and boundaries in the home, and (c) showed parental respect for their children's identity while functioning within the family. In a similar vein, parental strategies of emphasizing family values and reinforcement of a child's work ethic and skills proved valuable (Werner & Smith, 1982). In Werner's (1982) summary she emphasizes some "protective factors" found that are indicators of resilient children from infancy to adulthood:

Three types of protective factors emerge from our analyses of the developmental course of high-risk children from infancy to adulthood: (1) dispositional attributes of the individual, such as activity level and sociability, at least average intelligence, competence in communication skills (language and reading), and internal locus of control; (2) affectional ties within the family that provide emotional support in times of stress, whether from a parent, sibling, spouse, or mate, and (3) external support systems, whether in school, at work, or church, that reward the individual's competencies and determination, and provide a belief system by which to live. (p. 80)

Interestingly, Masten (2001) believes most case studies of resilience operate under basic human adaptive systems. As a result, Masten (2001) examines recent evidence in the study of resilience from two significant approaches: variable-focused and people-focused. Variable focused approaches,

use multivariate statistics to test for linkages among measures of the degree of risk or adversity, outcome, and potential qualities of the individual or environment that may function to compensate for or protect the individual from the negative consequences of risk or adversity. (p. 229)

People-focused approaches contrast “people who have different profiles within or across time on sets of criteria to ascertain what differentiates resilient children from other groups of children” (p. 229). Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses and are used simultaneously in studies (Masten, 2001). The variable-focus capitalizes statistical data, however fails to portray models “in the lives of real people, losing a sense of the whole and overlooking distinctive regularities across dimensions” (p. 229). The person-focus is helpful for models in the lives of people throughout time, but can provide vagueness in particular connections that provide beneficial clues to explain the processes (Shiner, Tellegen, & Masten, 2001).

Resilience of Black mothers. Currently, there is limited research on resilience in adulthood, specifically about Black mothers. Stack (1974) did a ethnographic study of social support among Black families. She discovered that single mothers living in urban areas were integrated into resilient networks of kin and friends. Stack highlights and documents the strength of poor families and how poor mothers struggle to survive in

their neighborhoods with few resources. One limitation of the study was Stack did not compare mother-only families to two-parent families; therefore her findings were limited only to the social integration and resiliency of mother-only families (McLanahan & Booth (1989).

O'Connor (2002) did a study on Black women divided among three age groups and gathered their life stories to provide understanding on how constraints and opportunity with three different generations affect the process of resilience. She argues there is little insight into the complex factors, which give opportunity for the development of the traits connected to resilience. Furthermore, O'Connor is under the assumption that resilience "is the response to a complex set of interactions involving person, social context, and opportunities" (Rigsby, 1994, p. 89). The complex factors of constraint and opportunity have not been accounted for in her research to understand how marginalized groups (Blacks) growing up in different eras may not have faced adversity in the same way. Constraints are defined as practices that systematically limit the educational chances of marginalized groups. Opportunities are defined as institutional and non-institutional resources (O'Connor, 2004). The changing environment of constraint and opportunity shape the individual's experience with adversity and the process by which they experience educational resilience (O'Connor, 2004). She then concludes with the suggestion that "efforts must be directed toward developing the precision with which we make sense of this process within and across racial and ethnic groups" (p. 898).

Future resiliency studies. In conclusion, many scholars have noted an interest in resilience (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Glantz & Johnson, 1999; Wang, Haertel, & Wahlberg, 1994) while other scholars express concern about the rigor of the theory and research in resilience (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Luthar, 1993; Luthar & Cushing, 1999). In *The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work*, Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker, (2000) give a brief historical view of resilience and address four major concerns that have been raised about the construct of resilience. The four concerns mentioned are: (a) vagueness in the definition of resilience, (b) variations in functionality and risk experiences of resilient children, (c) the wavering phenomenon of resilience, and (d) theoretical concerns of resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Throughout the article, the authors address the concerns and offer solutions, clarity, and recommendations for future research on resilience. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker, (2000) conclude that although the concerns are warranted, research theory on resilience is still valuable. Although the construct is complex, important advances have been made in the last few decades on understanding resilience. In addition, continuous investigation of protective processes can expand resilience literature and offer useful recommendations on future works (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Also, as we move toward new research we must acknowledge that within these groups different experiences occur as well. Only a nominal quantity of literature suggests that parental involvement in schools comprises motherwork (David et al., 1994; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994; Griffith, 1995; Fuller et al., 1996; West et al., 1998; Stambach & David, 2005).

Furthermore, the examination of Black mother's educational views, choices, and experiences is warranted because their standpoints are underrepresented in educational research (David, West & Ribbens, 1994; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994).

Summary

The Black feminist conception provides understanding of why a Black mother's participation in her child's educational experience is different from a White mother's participation. But, literature in education is still heavily centered on the experiences of White middle-class mothers (David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Epstein, 2001; Fuller, Holloway, Rambaud, & Eggers-Pierola, 1996; Griffith, 1995; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994; Reay, 1998; Stambach & David, 2005; West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998). In general terms, White mothers do not have to confront cultural resistance (racism) from society as they play the role of mothering in their child's educational experience. White mothers tend to have increased power, privilege, resources, and influential social networks as they navigate through the educational system (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Holme 2002; Fields-Smith, 2005). Black mothers must continue to challenge cultural resistance while empowering their children's educational experience. I introduced the theoretical framework of motherwork to provide understanding of how these mothers are resilient in their quest for educational opportunity for their children.

Understanding the Black mother's role as it relates to the resiliency traits used in helping their children achieve success by entering into higher education needs further examination. This focus on resiliency traits as it relates to Black mothers will provide

necessary parenting strategies, which can be shared with other mothers from different backgrounds. Furthermore, the examination of Black mothers in conjunction with resiliency and the framework of motherwork can provide a different lens of caring and understanding for their children's educational experience. Future research should expand on resiliency in adulthood and specific ethnic groups. Masten (2001) suggests the next step in advancing research on resilience is to charter waters on the side of adaptive systems of human development in genes, relationships, and individuals in complex living systems. Furthermore, drawing attention to the research on "human capabilities and adaptive systems that promote healthy development and functioning have the potential to inform policy and programs that foster competence and human capital and aim to improve the health of communities and nations while also preventing problems" (p. 235). Masten (2001) is in agreement with Garmezy (1991) as it relates to recommending further research development in human adaptive systems. Finally, research should continue to expand on Black women in a positive light, from their standpoint, not that of White, middle class women.

As a research project, this study examines the resilience of Black mothers as they advocate and promote the educational experiences of their daughters. This study could not be conducted without the story of these Black mothers' experiences as they teach and nurture their daughters to incorporate racial and ethnic identities, balance child-rearing, work outside the home, and promote the educational experiences of their daughters. The theoretical framework of motherwork helps to enlighten the work of

these Black mothers because it encourages researchers to think about the multifaceted responsibilities in which these Black mothers must contend, in addition to being a single parent as they help guide their children's educational experience. There is research that asserts that Black fathers can influence parenting by assisting and playing crucial roles in the parenting of Black children regardless of marital status (Willie & Reddick, 2010). However, this research study will examine the parental role of single Black females and motherwork is appropriate for this perspective.

Chapter Three: Methodology

According to Yanchar and Williams (2007), contextual sensitivity, creativity, coherence, conceptual awareness, and cultural reflection are important elements in a research methodology. As indicated in chapter two, the conceptual framework of motherwork (Cooper, 2007) allows the researcher to conduct a study which examines Black mothers in a way that addresses race, class, and gender variables in relation to the education of their children (Cooper, 2007). Portraiture (Lawrence-Lighfoot, 2005) was selected after consideration of the research participants, population, and data for the study. Portraiture allows the researcher to gather in-depth findings from the research participants with sensitivity, meaning, and reflection. This chapter discusses the research design, participant selection, site of the study, data collection, data analysis, and study limitations.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this research was to identify and explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions of four single Black mothers who have daughters that have been successful in their formal education. The data was examined to determine if the outcomes and behaviors of the single Black mothers can provide a more advanced understanding about parenting. Furthermore, three questions will be used to guide the study.

Research Questions

As stated in chapter one, the following research questions will guide my research study:

1. How do mothers communicate and interact with their daughters regarding educational success at stages from early childhood through high school?
2. What resources do mothers draw upon with people and entities beyond their home regarding their daughters' education experience?
3. How do mothers address concerns of cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with their daughters in the context of educational success?

Research Design

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) defines portraiture as a “document, with text that comes as close as possible to painting with words” (p. 6). She elaborates that creating portraits, allows the researcher to “enter people’s lives, build relationships, engage in discourse, make an imprint and leave” (p. 12). In developing portraits, the researcher needs to observe and record the ways the research participants shape and transform the environments in which they live and work (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2002) describe portraiture as a methodology that “creates a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality structure, and history” (p. 14). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis assert portraiture is different from other models of ethnography in:

Its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic description, in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy (thus linking inquiry to public discourse and social transformation), and in its explicit recognition of the use of self as the primary research instrument. (p. 14)

They also assert that portraiture serves as “counterpoint to the dominant chorus of social scientists whose focus largely centers on the identification and documentation of social problems” (p. xvi).

The portraitist seeks to create a picture in which the reader will feel drawn; which allows the reader to see, feel, smell, and touch the setting. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) gives a vivid explanation:

I wanted to create a narrative that bridged the realms of science and art, merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature. I wanted the written pieces to convey the authority, wisdom, and perspective of the “subjects”; but I wanted them to feel as I had felt, that the portrait did not look like them but somehow managed to reveal their essence. I wanted them to experience the portraits as both familiar and exotic so that in reading them, they would be introduced to a perspective that they had not considered before. And finally, I want the subjects to feel “seen” like I had felt seen-fully attended to, recognized, appreciated, respected and scrutinized. I wanted them to feel both the discovery and generosity of the process as well as the penetrating and careful investigation. (p. 6)

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) believes portraiture research is new and innovative in the sense that it attempts to thrust “the boundaries of interpretive inquiry, navigating borders that typically separate disciplines, purposes, and audiences in the social sciences” (p. 7). She suggests portraiture is a methodology that bridges art and the application of observation and experimentation, which appeals to understanding and sentiment, and seeks to join the attempts of documentation and interpretation. Featherstone (1989) refers to portraiture as the “people’s scholarship”; a scholarship in which “scientific facts gathered in the field give voice to a people’s experience (p. 375).

In addition, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) asserts that portraiture will pursue truth and knowledge projected by the “people’s scholarship” where it will be daring, enlightening, and valuable. I believe this methodology captures my endeavor to answer my research questions because portraiture seeks to understand these mothers in light of their past experiences, history, and current context highlighting resilience. Equally important, the topics of motherhood, race, racial identity, childrearing, and working outside the home are personal, and portraiture will allow for deep expression and narrative through interviews and brief participant observation.

Furthermore, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) emphasizes the fundamental nature of portraiture is “to represent the research participant through the subjective, empathetic, and critical lens of the researcher” (p. 10). She explains, “one of the most powerful characteristics of portraiture is its ability to embrace contradictions, its ability to document the beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of the texture of human development and social relationships” (p. 9).

The major pieces of portraiture research include evolving themes, relationships, contexts, voice, and the artistic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002). According to Dixon, Chapman, and Hill (2005) researchers are able to delve into the intricacies of the research participants’ lives by “conducting lived research that seeks to bring forth the perspectives, voices, and experiences of the researcher and the participant, the portraitist and the subject” (p. 18). Furthermore, researchers are able to form empowering relationships between the researcher and participant (Denzin, 2003; McLaren, 1997).

In addition, portraiture allows a researcher to understand participants in their own context and provides the researcher with the insider perspective on how situations have shaped the participants' lives and experiences, which gives a holistic view to the researcher as the portrait is written. This emic perspective often goes unacknowledged (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989) because cultural, racial, and ethnic findings are dominated by the White perspective (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994). However, Greenfield and Cocking assert that the insider perspective gives understanding and provides meaning to the "motives behind in-group behaviors that may be misinterpreted or devalued by outsiders looking through the lenses of their own culture" (p. xi). Portraiture is appropriate for my study of single Black mothers because it integrates at once context and perspective.

According to Dixon, Chapman, and Hill (2005), researchers who use portraiture investigate "ways in which subjects meet, negotiate, and overcome challenges" (p. 18). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) clarifies that she moved outside of traditional methodologies of social science research because of its prolonged focus on "pathology and disease rather than health and resilience" (p. 18). Moreover, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2002) contend that research focused exclusively on failure tends to be superficial. Thus, it is easier to document failures than to find moments of resilience and success (Dixon, Chapman, & Hill, 2005). These characteristics of portraiture are suitable to address the concern of conflicting evidence and to collect data based on the research questions.

Portraiture was selected because it highlights the goodness in the participant and allows the researcher to hear the voices, experiences, behaviors, and actions of

participants related to raising their daughters from early childhood to high school. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2002) identify goodness “through measurable school indices as well as qualities that are more elusively captured in the words and actions of the actors” (p. 23). In addition, Dixon, Chapman, and Hill (2005) explain the researcher’s representation of the participant in portraiture is partial. This partiality gives the researcher (portraitist) the freedom to recognize his or her presence in the research by counteracting the impression that the researcher is the only expert on the lives and experiences of research participants (Dixon, Chapman, & Hill, 2005).

Several scholars (Eisner, 1998; Janesick, 2001; Richardson, 1990) agree with Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (2002) enthusiasm for conveying educational research through artistic lenses that may deviate from traditional methodologies, yet maintain portraiture is still a valid representation of research participants’ lives and experiences. Portraiture does not use the traditional method of social science where the researcher uses codified methods for generalization (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2005). In contrast, portraiture seeks to “document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified” (p. 14).

The method of portraiture can educate researchers in three ways: pushing boundaries, expanding their audiences, and challenging perspectives. Portraiture pushes the boundaries of inquiry by attempting to bridge aesthetics and empiricism that is typically separated by academic disciplines (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Second,

portraiture allows the researcher to expand her audiences to welcome more diverse dialogues about educators and schooling. For, example, portraiture teaches the researcher to speak a language that is understandable, not exclusive (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Finally, portraiture challenges the researcher to identify other sources that have counterintuitive perspectives. This trains the researcher to “balance personal predisposition with disciplined skepticism and critique, which are central to success” (p. 11).

Participant Selection

A metropolitan area in the Southwestern United States was chosen as the site for this study to allow for participants from a range of educational backgrounds. This metropolitan area is rich in educational resources with a private university, an elite public university, a Hispanic serving institution (HSI), a Historically Black University (HBCU), a community college, education center, and medical research centers. This metropolitan area allows for a large pool of single Black mothers for the study.

In order to identify the participants, I used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allowed me “to select information-rich cases for in-depth study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Purposeful sampling provides detailed understanding and encourages the researcher to select a key group that holds a characteristic that is salient to the study (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). Thus, I sought single Black women who differed in terms of educational level.

I selected five participants for the study. According to Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003) qualitative samples are usually small. They give three reasons for the small sample size: (a) if data are examined properly, there is a point where increasing sample size no longer gives new evidence; (b) incidence and prevalence are not the concern of qualitative research; and (c) qualitative studies provide detailed in-depth information. As stated above, portraiture uses a qualitative approach that allows the “subjects to feel “seen” like I (researcher) had felt seen-fully attended to, recognized, appreciated, respected and scrutinized” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002, p. 6).

This study examined the experiences, actions, and behaviors of single Black mothers as they helped navigate the educational experiences of their daughters. The women were selected based on the following criteria: females were eligible to participate in the study if they were Black and had been divorced, separated, or single and the primary care giver for their daughters.

Since the research focused on the single mother and her key role as a mother and caregiver, only biological mothers are eligible: stepmothers, grandmothers, foster-mothers, and othermothers were not considered for the study. In addition, my goal was to learn about the specific participation roles of the single mothers according to educational level. I limited my study to single Black mothers who had a: (1) doctoral degree from an accredited institution; (2) Master’s degree; from an accredited institution; (3) Bachelors degree; from an accredited institution; (4) some college; has attended a college, community college, or enrolled and did not finish with a degree; (5)

and no college; never had education beyond high school. I purposely choose one mother from each category, which allowed me to obtain a better representation of mothering by comparing the voices and experiences of these mothers by the level of education of each mother.

I chose these different levels of education because each level has a story and I felt it was important to include all these stories and not omit any of them. I believe gathering stories and narratives from participants with various educational backgrounds was more salient to the research study of identifying resiliency traits in the participants and refuting negative generalizations about single Black mothers and their educational care of their children.

In addition, the focus of the study was to gather deep, rich, and in-depth information, and the painting of a portrait takes time, therefore five participants were an appropriate sample. The research participants were chosen on a first-come, first-serve basis. I sent out an email (Appendix A) to various campus-related groups and church communities within the metropolitan area to recruit participants for the study. As stated in chapter two, strong religious orientation (church) is historically an important institution central to the Black community (Barbain, 1983; Barnes, 1985; Boyd-Franklin, 1989b; Richardson, 1991). First, I sent out an email (Appendix A) to campus-related groups with a predominantly Black population and Black church communities in the metropolitan area. Second, I gathered information from participants who expressed interest in participating in the study on a first-come, first-served basis. Third, I chose the

first five participants who responded to the recruitment email (Appendix A) and met the criteria outlined in the study. I planned for use three tiers to stratify participants in case of an overwhelming response. The three tiers were: level of education, single Black mothers who were 40 years old or older, and the degree attainment of their daughter (daughter have been currently enrolled in college or had a college degree). Fourth, I contacted participants on a first-come first-serve basis to ask if they are willing to participate in the study after explaining the research project. Fifth, I contacted additional participants and asked them if they would be willing to serve as alternates if any of the five current participants were unable to complete the research project. Finally, the researcher contacted all five participants to set up a pre interview meeting to review the research project in detail.

After completion of the study, each participant received a \$75 gift card for her participation. If at any time a research participant was unable to complete the study, she would be released from the study, and all data previously collected would destroyed and not be used in the study. As stated earlier, if a research participant was unable to complete the study, the researcher would contact an alternate research participant. However, it was not necessary to use an alternate research participant in this study.

I created a table to provide snapshot of the Black mothers who participated in the study:

Table 2.

Black Mothers Interviewed for Study

<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Education Level</u>	<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Daughters</u>	<u>Parental Involvement</u>	<u>Employment Status</u>
Synclaire	Bachelors Degree	Single	Private	Junior at an HBCU	Yes	Full-time
Rachel	college coursework; Finished court reporting school	Married; Single while raising daughter	Community College	Bachelor's Degree and MBA	No	Full-time
Megan	Masters Degree	Divorced	HBCU/Online	Junior at an HBCU	Yes	Full-time
Pamela	Dropped out in 10 th grade	Single	None	Bachelor's Degree	No	Full-time
Rita	Doctoral Degree	Divorced	Private/Public	1 st and 2 nd daughters: Bachelor's Master's 3 rd daughter is a Senior at a private university	Yes	Full-Time

Data Collection

Before data was collected I completed all institutional requirements and approvals necessary to begin the data collection process, including IRB approval from my institution. In this study, I explored the experiences, behaviors, and actions of single Black mothers as they raised their daughters. The primary sources of data collection were interviews and brief participant observation. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995):

The expressive power of language is the most important resource for accounts. A crucial feature of language is its capacity to present descriptions, explanations, and evaluations, and evaluations of almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world, including itself. (p. 126)

Interviews allowed the research participants to tell their story through experience. The interview method placed importance on understanding by paying close attention to the reported words and actions of the research participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This method was appropriate for the study because the research topic involved the personal stories, experiences, behaviors, and actions of the research participants.

Interviews. I interviewed each research participant three times for one hour each time using three semi-structured interview protocols (see Appendices B, C, and D). The first interview explored personal trajectories, for example how the participant was raised, her history, and experiences. The second interview explored how the participant raised her daughter and what her goals and aspirations were for her daughter's education. The final interview focused on reflections from the two previous interviews. After each interview I compiled field notes to reflect upon topics in the interviews. This served as a way to remember ideas or themes when analyzing the data.

During the first interview the participants were asked questions pertaining to early experiences in relation to school, family, and other influential experiences. The second interview built upon the first interview with the present experiences of the research participant. The third interview served as the conclusion of the two previous

interviews with each participant and also served as a time to clarify any questions from the previous interviews. I asked each research participant for permission to contact them if I had any additional questions pertaining to the research. I informed the participants they would have a chance to read and reflect on what I wrote on the portrait of them. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) referred to allowing the research participant to read what was written about them to extend beyond the crafting of the manuscript in portraiture methodology.

The interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon time between the researcher and research participant. All three interview protocols were used as a reference to guide the conversation instead of a scripted dialogue. The intent is for the mothers to have a voice in which the researcher listens “for the timbre, resonance, cadence, and tone of their voices, their message, [and] their meaning” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002, p. 99). Furthermore, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis assert, as the researcher records the interviews and all that she hears, she will “try to document the words, the gestures, and the tone, witnessing the voices in context, and seeking to understand the actors’ (research participant’s) interpretation of their talk” (p. 99).

Interview questions. I asked open-ended interview questions. According to Seidman, (1998) open-ended questions allow “territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction her or she wants. It does not presume an answer” (p. 69). My initial interview questions were constructed from research literature on Black mothers and their educational care of their children. I chose 15 interview questions to

ask during the three one-hour interviews scheduled with the mothers.

The first interview protocol consisted of five questions (see Appendix B), the second interview protocol consisted of six questions (see Appendix C) and the third interview protocol consisted of four questions (see Appendix D). The final selection of the 15 interview questions were based on the ability of the individual questions to talk about information that will help me answer the fundamental research questions that guided the research study.

Finally, all interviews were audio-recorded and electronic file were kept in a secure location for confidentiality and anonymity purposes. However, one interview was conducted over the phone due to the location of the mother.

Instrumentation. Voice is a major research instrument of the portraitist. The researcher's voice is everywhere, in the text, framing the portrait, and echoing the themes of the study. In a similar vein, the researcher's voice is restrained and controlled (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002). I endeavored to never outshine the participant's voice. I attempted to achieve balance by reporting an authentic portrait and maintaining the mother's voice.

Since there was concern of objectivity on using voice as instrumentation, I chose to use voice as a witness. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2005) define the voice of witness as "underscoring the researcher's stance as a discerning observer and sufficiently distanced from the action to be able to see the whole, as far enough away to depict patterns that actors in the setting might not notice because of their involvement in

the scene” (p. 87). This voice emphasized the researcher as a separate observer. Using voice as a witness, allowed me to “stand on the edge of the scene, scanning the action, systematically gathering details of behavior, expression, and talk, remaining open and receptive to all stimuli” (p. 87). In addition I used voice as an outsider, which allowed me to see a different perspective and brought objectivity to the study.

I was also emic as well. I am a single Black mother. I am aware of the bias that I may have because of my race and gender. I used my notes from journaling and coding the interviews as stated in the portraiture section as checkpoints. This ensures that partiality was used to understand the bias I have in this research study and will counteract the impression that I am the only expert on the lives and experiences of the Black mothers and daughters. Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of race in this dialectic process, I am able to bring credibility to the research by being a Black mother myself. Since portraiture methodology calls for in-depth conversation and narrative, the exchange is aided by the commonality between the portraitist and the mothers sharing the same race and gender that provides a level of comfort and acknowledgement during the interview process. This commonality allows the mothers and I to embrace each other and experience the beautiful and the ugly together in the human experience of dialogue.

Data Analysis

When all individual interviews were completed, I reviewed my research questions and notes to find points of interest for ideas and themes. Each individual interview was transcribed by a professional transcriber and then coded by me. During

the coding, my goal was to produce a “detailed and systematic recoding of themes addressed in the interview and to link the themes and interviews together under a reasonably exhaustive category system” (Burnard, 1991, p. 462). In portraiture, the portraitist (me) draws out and conducts developing themes using five methods of conversion and contrast: (a) repetitive refrains, (b) resonant metaphors and symbolic expressions, (c) themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals, (d) triangulation to interlace data, and (e) builds themes and discloses patterns experiences by research participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002). Based upon these five methods, during data analysis I concentrated on hearing the stories and witnessing any action to reflect on the relationships and meanings of both, therefore, finding patterns.

Once transcriptions were completed, I spent some time on self-reflection to make sure the awareness of self is “monitored, subdued, and restrained (though never silenced)” (p. 86). First, notes were made after each interview regarding what was discussed in the interview. Second, I immersed myself in the data, by reading the transcripts again and taking notes throughout the reading themes in the transcripts. Third, I “open coded” by having a category system that accounted for the interview data (Berg, 1989). Then I gave the mothers a .pdf copy of the transcribed interview to allow for review and response within a two-week time period. This allowed me to check on the validity while the categorizing process was in process (Burnard, 1991). In between analysis, I interpreted and analyzed data to determine if additional questions were

needed based on whether the current semi-structured questions provided enough information to answer my research questions.

To ensure the anonymity of the mothers, a fictitious name was chosen for the mothers (Glense, 2006). The names provided the protection, privacy, and anonymity I sought for this research project. I was always mindful and protective of the mother who is vulnerable in having shared her personal experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2005). After each individual interview, all notes will be transferred to an external drive and kept in a secured and locked area.

Trustworthiness

I addressed concerns of trustworthiness and limitations. Every attempt was made by myself to highlight these concerns, but based on the design of portraiture some limitations may remain. The geographical region of the mothers and the small sample size of qualitative studies were placed limits on the study. In addition, I checked for accuracy by allowing the research participants to read their transcription of the interview and asking them to respond to the accuracy of the transcription. This produced a comparison in which modifications could be made to ensure the portrait is authentic. Next, I provided a rich, thick description of the portraits, which will “allow the reader to enter the research context” (Glense, 2006, p. 38).

Summary

This qualitative study used portraiture to explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions of single Black mothers as they raise their daughters. The conceptual framework

of motherwork mentioned in chapter two, helped me examine the conflicting evidence relating to parenting of single Black mothers. The goal of the researcher was to make sure the research questions could be answered by using portraiture methodology, thus providing additional evidence on the parenting roles of these single Black mothers.

In a similar vein, I was not interested in generalization, but single cases. The subtler the description, the more likely identification and resonance will occur (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2005). Documenting one portrait that confirmed or disconfirmed evidence to prior research findings on the negative parental roles of single Black mothers is noteworthy for research, thus allowing educators “to broaden theory with greater explanation and predictive power” in an area where limited research has been conducted (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 24).

In addition, this method guided and provided me with the tools necessary to gather data and report on accurate and truthful findings at the conclusion of this study. By situating the mothers in their historical, cultural, and social contexts, portraiture highlighted the ways in which childrearing is connected to their educational care for their daughters instead of viewing their behaviors and actions in isolation; this will allow additional insight on Black parenting which is central to the entire study.

Chapter Four: A Portrait of Synclaire (Bachelor's degree)

“Every mother should have a village.”

In Synclaire's family, college was always the expectation. Throughout my interaction with Synclaire, she would constantly express, “it was a given you were going to school, that was pretty much it.” College-educated people consistently surrounded Synclaire during her childhood.

Everyone in my family, my grandfather and my grandmother both went to college. They [grandparents] were born in 1910, so going to college at that time was not, you know, well known. My mom, myself, my cousins, pretty much everyone in my family, has a college degree, not going to college is more the anomaly than a lot of families going to college.

In Synclaire's childhood, education was always at the forefront of her mind. Based on her facial expressions and tone of voice, I was able to observe that she was extremely excited that her educational experience had been so positive. She recalls a moment when a relative was her professor in college.

My grandmother's sisters, the ones who were alive when I was born, were all teachers. All of them were teachers. And I have cousins who are professors in college, as a matter of fact when I first went to college, the first time, one of my cousins was actually my professor.

Synclaire's narrative reveals being college-educated was very important in her family, and that having a degree gave her opportunity to influence people's lives and her community. I conducted three one-hour interviews with Synclaire to gather data for this portrait. In this portrait, I explored how the expectation of college influenced Synclaire's experience as a mother and shaped her thoughts on education towards her daughter. In

addition I am able to identify the parental involvement of the Synclaire and explored the experiences, behaviors, and actions as she raised her daughter. First, the portrait highlights how Synclaire communicated and interacted with Mackenzie (her daughter) about education from early childhood through high school. Second, the portrait investigates if Synclaire used any resources from outside the home regarding Mackenzie's educational experiences. Finally, the portrait illustrates how Synclaire addressed the concerns of racial identity, endurance and empowerment within herself and with Mackenzie in the context of educational success.

I met Synclaire when she arrived for her first interview. She was the first single mother to respond to my recruitment e-mail. The interviews took place in my office after business hours. Synclaire is 42 years old and has natural curly hair that is sandy reddish brown. Synclaire works for the local government. Synclaire is from Texas and has lived in the state all of her life. She received her bachelor's degree in criminal justice from a private university in 2001. Synclaire gives the impression during our conversations that she is a woman who likes to have lots of fun, but can be serious as well. She seems to really enjoy life and I loved the free flowing spirit that she exuded as she spoke. Her daughter completed her first two years at a community college and then transferred as a junior to a historically Black university (HBCU) and is majoring in Kinesiology with a minor in Psychology.

Communicating and Interacting with Mackenzie

Motherhood is a partnership. Synclaire believes motherhood is a true

partnership with her child. It requires compromise and selflessness. She explains:

I've heard people say it's a partnership, and it really is a partnership, and it sounds weird because usually in a partnership, both parties have something they bring to the table but it's a partnership in that if you can get your kid to buy into what you're selling, they kind of go along with the program.

Synclaire adds that in this partnership there is a system in place of ensuring that

Mackenzie handles her responsibilities, however when responsibilities are neglected there are consequences. Synclaire communicates:

You want to be able to go places and do things and all that kind of stuff, you handle your business, you call when you say you're going to call, you go where you say you're going to go, you be with who you say you're going to be with and as long as you do that, the doors are wide open, you don't do that, everything is slammed shut.

This organization has worked well in Synclaire's partnership with Mackenzie. Synclaire calls it training. She believes if she trains her child, the partnership can be successful. By training, I gather she means discipline and responsibility from her words.

Even to this day, she's 21 years old, if she is out of town at school, and if she goes out with her friends, she calls me before she goes out, she tells me who she's going out with and she calls me when she gets back home. That's just training. You can't even buy that.

Synclaire did not have a partnership with her mother during childhood. She conveys, "her and I never really got a chance to connect." Synclaire's mother was 21 years old when she became pregnant with Synclaire.

I knew she was my mom, but the connection wasn't there. She would come down for the holidays, I knew who she was, but it felt more like she was an aunt, it was mother in a relative term instead of mother in a day-to-day hands on term.

After the birth of Synclaire, her mother decided to attend college. Since the college was in another city, the family decided that Synclaire would live with her grandparents while her mother went off to school. Synclaire recalls, “I lived with my grandparents until I was eight, so from birth to eight, those were my parents.” The distant connection between Synclaire and her mother was emotionally hard on Synclaire. When Synclaire went to live with her mother at age eight, she recounts how she felt.

I moved back here with her, she got married and had my brother, so there was not a lot of time. I came back to an already made family. That didn’t work out too well, of course, I rebelled, there was a lot of drama with him, my stepdad, drama and trauma and more drama and more trauma. I probably should be in therapy at this point. It’s only been in my latter years, actually after my daughter was born, we actually kind of started making some peace and trying to get to know each other.

In 1988, Synclaire became pregnant with Mackenzie at age 20. It was strange to Synclaire that she and her mother were the same age when they both became pregnant. Synclaire states, “We both found out we were pregnant after a major problem, I lost my grandfather and she had lost her brother, both in the month of March and 20 years apart.” Synclaire’s fear was that Mackenzie might follow in the same footsteps as her grandmother.

It’s like really weird and eerie, so of course you can imagine the whole time my daughter was going through that whole 20, 21 period, I was all paranoid because it was like, oh no, not the same thing all over again.

Synclaire’s early childhood and adolescent relationship with her mother motivated her to be present in Mackenzie’s life and maintain a close relationship. She proudly states, “It was really imperative to me that my daughter was going to know I was her

mama.” Synclaire took her responsibility as a mother seriously and wanted to make sure there was no distance between herself and her daughter.

I was going to be the first person she saw, there was going to be no doubt, nobody else was going to get to take that title; that was mine. And I was going to work hard and make sure I fulfill that. That’s why I really pushed myself because I wanted to make sure she knew who I was. I was about providing her with everything I could so that when she looked back on it, she wouldn’t have that gap, that disconnect that I had from my mom. She would know, know all about me and she wouldn’t have to wait until she was in her 20s or 30s to start building a relationship, the relationship would already be there from day one.

Synclaire does not have a philosophy on motherhood *per se*, she used what she learned from her grandparents as a guide on how she raised her daughter.

I was 20 when I had her, I didn’t even know who I was. I didn’t know my philosophy [of] myself, let alone my philosophy on how to raise someone else, I just knew what I’d seen and what I experienced and I just knew that I wanted to make sure that she knew from day one if nobody else in this world has her back, her momma will always be there for her, bottom line.

She did adjust her parenting style to fit her daughter specifically. However, I was able to detect from our conversations that discipline, respect, and responsibility were very important. Synclaire definitely believed that if she trained her child with certain behaviors and expectations, her child would adhere to the training.

You train the kid up, you teach him to say, no ma’am, and yes ma’am, please and thank you. Manners are the priority. You’re in church with the kid, you teach him about spiritual things, you teach them to respect their elders and teach them to, you know, I don’t necessarily buy into the whole kids should be seen and not heard thing because to me kids have a lot of interesting and important things to say, but there’s a time and a place for everything. She’s my only kid, I talked to her from the very start as if she could understand and was an adult. We grew up together. Wrong, right, good, bad or otherwise, now, and there was some consult in there like, if you’re wrong, I’m going to get in your butt, but I’ve got your back. If somebody is wronging you, you don’t have to take care of that, I’ll take

care of that, you do what you need to do, but it's always just been a parent/child relationship.

During our second interview, Synclaire showed me a picture of Mackenzie. This indicated there was a level of trust between us. In my experience, a mother doesn't share pictures of their children with people she does not trust. Mackenzie appeared to be tall in the photo and had a beautiful smile and a smooth chocolate complexion. Mackenzie had her mother's smile, but seemed to possess some strong traits that were not her mother's. After I complimented Mackenzie, Synclaire recalled the time when Mackenzie, who was 13 at the time, attended Synclaire's college commencement ceremony in 2002. Synclaire explains that Mackenzie gave her a card (that she still has) stating how proud she was of her mother's dedication and persistence on getting a degree while raising her. I observed that Synclaire was about to get emotional. We sat there in silence and Synclaire's smile indicates that she is glad she could share that moment with Mackenzie and with me.

She is the best thing I ever did. To me everything that's good and right and all the best parts of myself are in her and I can tell by the people she chooses to surround herself with, the way she conducts herself, the way other people relate to her, the way other people are drawn to her, the way she is around elders, the young kids, people just generally like her and I can see that. In seeing that, that lets me know that I had to have done something right.

As she reflected on being an effective mother, she seemed at peace with how things have turned out with her daughter. It spoke to the joy and pride she expressed about motherhood and raising Mackenzie.

She's 21 years old. She's never been in any trouble; major, minor, or otherwise. She has a good sense of self. Her friends that she surrounds herself with are all of the same ilk. We've never had any problems. We've never had any issues; no

sneaking out, no sneaking boys in, no sneaking drinking, no drugs, no kids, no, none of that.

What I really admire about Synclaire is that she realizes there is a supporting cast that has helped raise Mackenzie. She calls it her village, “I say ‘we’ as in my family, my friends, my church members, because truly she is a village child, everybody had a hand in raising her, it wasn’t just me by myself.” She happily gives credit to those who have helped her, understanding that Mackenzie benefited from the entire village.

Her grandmother, her great grandmother, my aunt, my mom, my brothers, my best friends, my co workers, church members, literally her teachers, her Pre K teacher still asks me about her every time she sees me, every time. All those people were my village. All those people helped to raise her and I think with all that is how we got to where we are now.

Synclaire’s perspective on her effectiveness as a mother was consistent with the goals she set as a mother. She wanted to make sure Mackenzie was well rounded. She explained,

I tried to put her in as many of those experiences and I never tried to hold her back because of my own fear, I wanted her to go out and experience as much of life as she possibly can and get all of those experiences.

In addition, she wanted to make sure Mackenzie was exposed to education, God, people and travel. Synclaire remembers one year when she let Mackenzie go on a ski trip to Colorado. She recalls, “It was a little nerve wracking, [but] she still talks about that trip.” The bottom line was Synclaire wanted to make sure Mackenzie was well rounded in her experiences.

I wanted to ensure that I gave her pretty much all the experiences that I could, to make sure I could instill the love of learning in her to make sure that I instilled a love for her people, a love for wanting to help other people, to give back to her

community, wanting to be a contributor, learning how to navigate the system, learning how to just be an all around good person. Instilling a love for God, instilling just being a well-rounded person basically, just a really well rounded, well versed person. You know, different camps, different programs, you know, as much stuff as I could get her into, and as many experiences as I could give her that was, you know, those were my goals to make sure she was well rounded.

Transition during my school years was hard. Synclaire moved around a lot between her grandparents' house and mother's house. With Synclaire's mother being in the military, this meant that Synclaire had to move when her mother was required to relocate. She reveals that moving around was difficult. The constant moving around made it difficult for her to settle into the school environment. Synclaire attended both segregated and desegregated schools. Her grandparents and parents were in segregated schools and went on to attend historically Black institutions (HBCUs). The different experiences she had provided a different outlook on what she wanted for Mackenzie's educational experience.

Since my mother was in the military and I lived with my grandparents for part of my life, I went to a few different elementary schools. I started school at my grandparents' home then moved to my mother's. I went to at least four different schools during that time. I went to middle school at my grandparents then moved back here for high school.

Audra: What kind of schools did you attend?

Synclaire: I attended a variety of schools. Elementary at my grandparents was segregated [predominantly Black] but with my mom the schools were desegregated [had a mixture of students].

Audra: How did they compare to your parent's school, segregated or desegregated?

Synclaire: My parents went to segregated elementary, junior, and high schools and then went to an HBCU so the majority of their education was segregated.

Audra: How did your schools influence you?

Synclaire: Even though I was pretty smart and scored exceptionally well on all my standardized tests, my grades did not really reflect that. Since I moved around so much, I never really got a chance to settle in and get a good group of friends. Once I got to high school, I felt really out of my element. The high school I attended was predominately Black. Then with the addition of a magnet program, [it] became increasingly Caucasian. I spent most of my time trying to fit in and find a group that was suited for me. I think that prepared me for later on in life because I learned how to deal with a variety of people.

Audra: How did your school experiences shape what you wanted for your daughter's education?

Synclaire: I decided early on that my daughter was going to stay at one school until she completed the program. I knew how important it [was] to build those relationships while in school. There were some kids that she went to school with from Pre K- 12th grade and they are some of her best friends now. I think it makes the transition from elementary - middle school and middle school - high school much easier if you already have your friend base set. Then you can spend more time studying and less time trying to fit in.

I had to lead by example. In 1988, she went to school, got pregnant, and quit after spring of 1989. Mackenzie was born that in the fall of 1989. Synclaire opened up on how her pregnancy changed her outlook on life as well. Her fear was that she would not be able to handle being a single mother, having a job, and going to school simultaneously. She reveals, "I was like, there's no way I can juggle having a kid, going to school and all that, I'm just going to be stuck doing some crappy job forever even though I knew I wanted to go back to school." Synclaire admits she was more focused while her daughter was in school as opposed to the first attempt she made to return to school after giving birth.

When I got pregnant I was really not focused to be quite honest. I found out I was pregnant on the day of my grandfather's funeral, and we were very, very close. And at the time, I wasn't sure what I was going to do or even if I wanted to deal with that [the pregnancy] and dealing with the loss of my grandfather. I went to school the following semester and I finished out that semester and then I quit. I quit for a while. And then after my kid got into school, I went back to school. Under the advice of [my daughter's school] principal at the time who encouraged me to go back to school and not give up on the dream just because I got pregnant. So I did, I went back, I did it, but at the time I honestly was not focused. I was actually more focused when I went back to school after I already had her because I knew at that point, it was going to be really difficult for me to encourage her and to continue to stay on her if I wasn't willing to make the sacrifice to do it myself. So that's what I did.

In the end, Synclaire was able to use her school experiences and the pregnancy to set a clear examples and expectations of what she wanted for Mackenzie. These experiences definitely shaped Synclaire's perspective and emphasized the importance of Mackenzie attending college as well.

I don't not remember a time that we didn't talk about her going to college. That was never an option for her not to go to college or some sort of trade school. You have to have some sort of paper [educational credentials] behind you, so we've always discussed the fact that you're going to have to go to school. If you want to get a job, or if you want to have a career rather, not just get a job, you can get a job doing anything, if you want to have a career, and you want to be able to do what you want to do and take yourself as far as you want to go, you're going to have to get some letters behind your name. She's always known that in order to be able to do the things she wants to do with herself, she's going to have to go to college. [There] was never not a time where higher education wasn't talked about, ever.

Synclaire definitely believed that her education made a difference in how she prepared Mackenzie's educational experience. She clarified, "[education] definitely makes a difference, it's harder when you don't know." By her experience in attending

college and having college knowledge, Synclaire was able to help Mackenzie navigate and prepare for college as well.

If you never navigated the whole college system and how that works and dealing with financial aid, learning about grants, scholarships and free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) and all these things, and ACTs and SATs and GPA's and how important that is. Class ranking, advanced placement (AP) classes, if you've never done any of that, or dealt with any of that, even if you have a kid who is motivated and wants to do those things, it makes it kind of difficult because you're behind the curve and you have to really, really push yourself to learn about all these things so you can better benefit your kid.

Synclaire believes parents must give their children an opportunity to be successful and education is an avenue to give them that opportunity. But it requires that parents get involved:

You've got to give them the opportunity, you've got to encourage them to go to school, you've got to encourage them to do good, you've got to go to those parent teacher conferences when you don't want to go, you've got to go to those PTA meetings, you've got to go to those campus advisory committee (CAC) meetings, you've got to learn who these people are so you can better equip your kid, you have to, that's what you set forth when you decided you were going to have it, that's your job, welcome to your first day of work. There's no excuse to not give your child every opportunity in this world to be successful and that's what education does, it grants them every opportunity in the world to be successful.

Since Synclaire attended and graduated from college while she raised Mackenzie, she understood the college process and was prepared to assist her. In addition, Synclaire's attended meetings held at the schools to understand certain processes high school students must navigate as they apply to college. These actions by Synclaire gave her the tools she needed to give Mackenzie access to higher education.

The day she went to *big girl* school. Synclaire recalled the day Mackenzie went

to kindergarten. I asked Synclaire if she was scared and she replied,

Not really. She went to Pre-K first, so it kind of eased her into kindergarten. She was very excited about school because thankfully, her great grandmother and her grandmother and myself had always tried to get her to learn things. So going into school she knew her numbers and her letters and how to write her name and all that before she got there, so she was very excited about it. I told her, you know, this is your first time going to big girl school. I remember talking about going to big girl school as opposed to going to daycare and how she would be learning new things and what proper etiquette was in school you know, to raise your hand if you have a question not just talk out, not to talk when the teacher was talking. It was really instructional but she was very excited to go and I was very excited to send her.

This was a smoother transition to kindergarten for Mackenzie than what Synclaire had experienced. Mackenzie was already in daycare and they had adjusted to being separated during the day.

I was working and she was going to daycare, the transition was not as difficult as it had been had I been home with her all up [until] into the time she started school. She was used to being away from me and I was used to being away from her, so it wasn't as big of a transition, and I got really involved in her school, so I kind of knew what I was getting involved in before she actually started.

In addition, Synclaire constantly talked to Mackenzie about life as an education. She described, "I have always looked at education as everyday is education whether it's formally in school or just life in general, so I tried to pass that on to her."

After Synclaire recounted the day Mackenzie went off to *big girl* school, I asked her to compare it to when Mackenzie went off to college. In Synclaire's case, it was a similar transition as her daughter went off to college. Her daughter went to a community college located in the city before and then transferred after two years to a 4-year public institution.

Actually, it was actually quite similar [to kindergarten] because she stayed here and went to a community college for two years. I kind of got to ease on into the transition of, knowing she'd be leaving to go to school. The summer before she left to go to school, she actually was working. I live on one end of town, she was working on the other end of town, staying at my mom's so I got used to coming home and nobody being there and talking to her and just seeing her on the weekends, so the transition again was pretty easy because I was able to work my way into it, it wasn't just high school graduation, summertime, gone, it was more of a transition process.

I asked Synclaire about taking Mackenzie to the four-year college:

We took her off to college, it was a caravan, my entire family went to get her moved in and set up. Her best friend and her are [attending] the same college and are roommates and they live together, so it wasn't that hard to send her off by herself, in both instances she had somebody she knew very well and who I knew their family and so it kind of worked out.

Synclaire utilized several ways to communicate and interact with Mackenzie regarding educational success from early childhood through high school. First, she solidified the bond of mother and daughter by maintaining a close and loving relationship with Mackenzie. In this mother/daughter relationship, she ensured that Mackenzie knew her and participated in day-to-day activities. She did this because she did not want there to be distance between her and Mackenzie; the distance she had with her own mother kept her focused on remaining present in Mackenzie's life. She was involved in school activities and organizations while Mackenzie was in school and attended Mackenzie's extra-curricular activities.

Second, she instilled the values of discipline, respect and responsibility in Mackenzie. She believed if she trained her daughter with those foundational values, Mackenzie would be a productive member of society. It reminds me of the Bible verse

that my mother taught me as I raise my daughter; train up a child in the way he (she) should go and when they are old they will not depart.

Finally, she consistently verbalized the importance of education. For example, she would communicate to Mackenzie that if she wanted a career and to live a self-sufficient life, she needed a college degree.

Resources outside the Home that Supported Educational Experiences

School choice. Synclaire's school choice for her daughter was pretty well mapped out based on the people she met while her daughter was in elementary, middle, and high school. Synclaire involved herself in the parent teacher association (PTA) during her daughter's elementary school, then making a connection with the elementary school's principal allowed her to send Mackenzie to a magnet program for middle school and then on to high school. Her daughter was part of the inaugural class for the magnet middle school.

Elementary, basically she went to her neighborhood elementary. That's when I got really involved with the school and was on the PTA, and on the campus advisory committee (CAC). I was on the committee to pick the new principal. By going to the elementary school and it being a relatively new school at the time and they had a new principal who came from Chicago. She [new principal] was very, very interested in seeing her African American students achieve at a higher level, she [new principal] ended up getting with a lady who was starting a new magnet program here in the school district. They worked together to get a lot of the kids from that elementary school to go to the middle school to the magnet program. She ended up going into that middle school, even though it was out of our district and it wasn't where she was supposed to go. She ended up going to the magnet program and being in the initial group of kids at that magnet program there. A lot of the kids from the magnet program were all going to the same high school, so she, of course, wanted to follow her friends. The school she ended up

going to was actually a very good school so I had no problems with it. We put in [for] a transfer but we ended up moving and ended up moving into that area.

By getting involved in the PTA, Synclaire was able to network and meet people that provided her with the knowledge necessary to make sure Mackenzie had an opportunity to attend a magnet school that would be beneficial academically. Copper (2005) discusses that mothers tend to choose schools that are culturally relevant and in the best interest of their children academically. In this case Synclaire based on her relationship with the Black principal that her daughter's best interests were being catered to and that choosing the magnet school would help Mackenzie's educational experience. In the end, the decision to let Mackenzie attend the magnet program also allowed Mackenzie to have her own network of friends. Based on these friendships, Mackenzie wanted to attend an affluent White high school her friends would attend. Synclaire knew the high school would be a good opportunity for Mackenzie to thrive academically as well. The resources from school administrators and friends outside the home played a critical role in the school choice for Mackenzie.

Synclaire mentions how much she really loved Mackenzie's high school. She loved the traditions and the programs that were offered in the high school. She also mentioned there were times where when she talked with her daughter about how they might not be as financially stable as her classmates, but her love and support of her daughter would outweigh the money.

Audra: There's a conversation that you had with your daughter and you said that they had a lot of *haves* at your daughter's high school. What did you mean by that?

Synclaire: Well, the high school where she attends, it's a very well known high school in this area, a lot of the people who are in local government, in the city, the county, in the state, congressman, senators, people send their kids to that school. She was an athlete there and she was the only person on the team out of the whole team of 13 girls who had a single parent. Everybody else's parents were married, had been married for eons, two incomes, you have parents where both of them were lawyers or one was a doctor, they just had financially a lot of money. However we came to find out a lot of the kids would come over to our little old apartment because what they might have had financially, they missed in the attention, because their parents worked a lot and they would buy them things and give them things, but that whole connection wasn't there. Even though she didn't get all the things monetarily, of course, all her friends had cars by the time they were 15 or 16, went on all these trips, she wasn't able to do all that, however, she did appreciate the things she did get because she worked hard to get those things. I think that was the trade off, she didn't get everything financially, but she had my backing so, that was good enough.

Audra: Was this a predominately White school?

Synclaire: Yes, it is. It is but it started not being that way due to some district realignment. Yeah, there were many times with her being in AP classes that she might be one of one or one of two [Blacks] in class.

Even though Mackenzie may have been of two Blacks in certain classes, Synclaire was willing to support Mackenzie and make the sacrifice for a quality education that prepared Mackenzie for college.

Audra: Can you tell me three things that you liked about her high school?

Synclaire: I liked the fact that they were really focused on getting kids to school [college] so they had a lot of programs in house that other high schools did not have. I liked the fact that being one of the oldest schools around, it was full of tradition, so you got into that, they were a lot of things that were held sacred to that school community that endeared me to that, and I liked the fact that the teachers and the staff were awesome. If you had any issues or problems you can just call them up and they would definitely work with you on whatever and they were very supportive. Even when she goes back now her old teachers will see her, they'll still write her letters of recommendation even though she's been gone for two years. It was really a community school. I really liked that.

By the way Synclaire expressed herself; she believed that education meant survival based on her upbringing as a child. Her school choices and connections she made with others during Mackenzie's elementary and middle school experiences reflects that she understood education could make or break Mackenzie's future and she wanted to make sure Mackenzie's future was secure.

I am always there for her. As a single mother, Synclaire said, "I don't think there was ever an option to not work outside the home." She recalls that she had a supportive boss that understood her situation and she was able to attend her daughter's school activities during work hours. She gets really excited talking about her boss, with reflection on how blessed she was to have a boss in her corner. She realized that she could have had a boss that didn't understand her situation and things would have been much more difficult.

Before I got my degree, I was working for the school district. I was going to school and she was in school and my boss at the time, who was the epitome to me of if I ever became a boss, I would be like him. He would let me take off work to go to school. He understood I needed to take off work to go to her parent/teacher conferences and basketball games and whatever else. It was not that difficult because, I think if I had had anybody else, it would have been a lot more difficult. If I didn't have any work to do or if I was done with my work, I would work on my homework or schoolwork or papers or whatever, it really made it really easy. I don't feel like I ever missed anything, well, I know I didn't miss anything. I never missed anything. I was at everything. Even when I was going to school full time and working full time, I did not miss a basketball game, not a tournament, not a parent/teacher conference, not a school play, not a band recital, nothing, I was at everything. I don't feel like I missed anything by working outside the home.

Synclaire credits the great understanding of her boss for strengthening her relationship with Mackenzie. Her daughter knew she would always be there for her.

I think it strengthened our relationship, she knew that no matter what was going on, I was going to be there. If they went out of town, I was there, if they traveled [in the] summertime, if she was traveling for sports, I'm there. Whatever it was, I was there. So she always knew, wherever she was, if she was in anything, she could look up and she knew that I would be there. And I was really proud to say that from the time she hit middle school all the way till she got through high school, I never missed, I mean even before that, but I never missed a game, a tournament, nothing. I was there to pick her up every day from school. She always knew that I would be there.

When I asked Synclaire about the activities she participated with her daughter, she spoke of reading, working on workbooks, cooking, and walking (to explore).

We read, a lot. I am an avid reader and so our house is always full of books and so we read a lot even though she hates to read, I don't understand it, I tried so hard. She doesn't like to read, but I read to her all the time, I would go out and buy all these wordbooks and we would work on the wordbooks and then it was that kind of stuff. We would also do things like cooking, which you can use math and weights and all this stuff. We would go for walks just for life learning. We were always doing some sort of activity, where some learning was involved. I refused to buy video games, she didn't have any of that. I would send her outside, I'd tell her, go play and bring me back a crawfish and this, that and the other, and some other stuff. So she'd go find something rotten that she found and we'd figure it out what it was and we'd look it up, so it was always something where it would be fun, but learning was always involved.

Audra: What was your favorite activity?

Synclaire: I think my favorite was going to the park. We would go out, and that's the one thing about living here is that there's so many things to do, we would go out to one of the big parks and go exploring, climbing trees, she climbed more than I did, picking up bugs, and looking under rocks and going looking at the flowers, going to the zoo, anything with animals in it, we were all over it. Going to the zoo, just spending time together and finding weird things, that nobody else would think of, which is something we do now to this day. "Ooh, I found this place, let's go over here" and she's like "well, how did you find it?" and I'll say, "I don't know, I just found it, let's go do this." She said something to me a couple of weeks ago, I think pretty much sums up our thing "You know what mom? We had the most fun doing some of the weirdest things that nobody else would ever think of doing, I like that."

Every mother should have a village. Synclaire was aware that she had been a hands-on mother, but she was also quick to acknowledge her supporting cast known as “her village.” She expressed, “I have a village. Every mother should have a village.” Even though her daughter’s father had little involvement, she found refuge in her family and friends. She even recounted one of the most memorable moments she had with “her village.” I saw the excitement and joy in her voice and eyes and everything else becomes non-existent when she talked about her villiage:

Of course the village always starts with those closest to you. My mom, my grandmother, my aunt, [and] my brothers, have all stepped up to the plate. They’re all very supportive of my daughter. Before my grandmother passed away she was really the hands-on caretaker for my daughter. I was living with my grandmother while I was going to school so she and my aunt really stepped up and took care [of Mackenzie].

My aunt has always been very hands-on. My mom, just like I said I was at every event, so was my mother. She was at everything. Her godfather and her godmother, her godmother is my best friend. She was about 17 or 18 when she stepped up to the plate and said she would be my daughter’s godmother. I mean we were babies, we were kids and even though she was just a teenager herself, she has fulfilled all her god motherly duties above and beyond even though we were both so young when she said that she made that commitment to me to help if anything happened to me.

Her godfather is one of the most awesome people I have ever met in my life and I met him through her godmother. He’s actually her godmother’s older cousin, he’s more around the age of my mom, but he is one of the smartest people I know and he’s always challenging not just her and me, to you know, both do better academically, professionally. They support her in everything.

I have my village and it really does take a village. I’ve tried to surround myself with like-minded people. I’ve always tried to surround myself with people who were trying to do things for themselves and better themselves. They can be examples to my daughter. It’s not where you start. It’s where you finish. They come from variety of backgrounds. I have friends who never struggled a day in their lives and some who are still struggling but they’re still going after it to this

day. You can see every end of the spectrum and appreciate all that, so, yeah I have my village and I don't know what I would have done without them. I don't know where either one of us would have been where we are today without all of them.

Audra: What's one of the most memorable things that the people in your village did for you?

Synclaire: I mentioned before that my daughter played basketball and it was senior night, which is where the parents come up and they recognize the parents. And as I said before, my daughter was the only one on the team who had just a mom. I was there, my mom was there, her godmother was there, her godfather was there, some of my church members were there, some of my friends were there, her elementary school principal was there, it was literally about 20 people. When they called her name, we all went on the floor, and we all were there for her and to me that meant a lot to me that they thought enough of me and of her to come out on that night to support her when she would have been standing there just, you know.

Synclaire drew upon unique resources outside the home to support Mackenzie's educational experience. First, she was able to get support and information from Mackenzie's school administrators. These administrators had insight on some good schools in the school district and were able to convince Synclaire to explore those school choice avenues for the betterment of Mackenzie.

Second, Synclaire received unlikely cooperation and encouragement from her boss. Synclaire's boss supported her relationship with Mackenzie by allowing her to have a flexible work schedule in order to attend activities and programs with Mackenzie. Synclaire knew that her boss's characteristics were not the norm, however she was blessed that he was her boss while Mackenzie was in her childhood and adolescent years.

Finally, throughout this portrait Synclaire highlights the importance of her “village.” Synclaire’s grandmother and aunt were instrumental in being a caretaker for Mackenzie while Synclaire attended school and worked. Synclaire also gives credit to Mackenzie’s godmother who acted as a mentor to Mackenzie as well. In addition, to supplement the father figure in Mackenzie’s life, Synclaire was supported by her male friends and Mackenzie’s godfather to provide that positive male role in her life. All these resources outside the home assisted Synclaire in making sure Mackenzie’s educational experience was positive.

Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success

The day a White boy called me a Nigger. The day Synclaire realized that she was Black happened at church camp, of all places. When I asked her about the realization of being Black, her first response was, “I first realized I was Black..... oh God, this is so horrid.” Up until this point she had attended school with Black kids and had seen White people but did not understand the difference. While at church camp there was a White boy who liked her and she liked him. Everything was fine until his friends began to tease him about liking a Black girl. She was nine or ten at the time.

It was at that church camp where I was first called the “N” word by him. It floored me, I was like, wait, why does that matter? That’s when it first hit me that there’s really some difference, some people have different ideas. It was at church camp.

I continued by asking her, he called you the “N” word?

Synclaire: Yes, he called me the “n” word, he told me to get away from him because he wasn’t going to like no “Ns.” So yeah, there it is.

Audra: How did that make you feel when a White boy called you a nigger?

Synclaire: I don't think I've ever felt like such "less than" in my life. I've been raised to feel like I'm smart and special and intelligent and all these things and then that one word, it just erased all of that. It was as if I stopped, as if I was no longer a person, no longer human, no longer, I was a thing, I was a thing that was despicable and despised and nobody, it really, I mean it's been 30 years and it's still bugs me to this day that one word, said in that manner, it just rips up your identity away from you and makes you less than, instantly. I mean everything else you've ever done, everything you thought you were, you're none of that, you're just there and that's all you are and that's it.

Audra: How were able to overcome that?

Synclaire: Well, after I cried, which I did, because my feelings were hurt. My counselor who was with us from church, we talked to them. When we went back home, I talked to my grandfather, my grandmother, my mom, it was just like you know, they pretty much explained to me that people sometimes, when they can't hurt you physically, will do things to hurt you emotionally and you can either decide to let that determine how you're going to be or you can be better than they think you are. And that you can't control how people think, or see, or view you, all that you can control is your response to it and there are always going to be people who are going to think you're less than just because of the color of your skin, and your job is to keep right on moving and let them think whatever they're going to think and you do what you need to do.

When Synclaire spoke about racial identity, she commented on the things her grandfather instilled in her. She evoked, "he was very vocal about the fact that he wasn't going to be anybody's 'boy.' And so, you know, he always taught me you don't bow down to anybody, you hold your head up high." She mentioned her grandfather was born in 1910 and understood how society operated. She stated, "He lived in an era where Blacks could still be lynched for looking at people the wrong way, but if you had an education it was invaluable." She reflected on his view of education:

My grandfather, would say that once you get your education, they can't take that away from you. You're no better than anybody, but you're definitely no lower

than anybody else and we're all the same, so he was really adamant that even where we were from that we didn't bow down to anybody, we walked with our head high, and he [said], you know, don't be prideful, but be confident about yourself and people are going to call you names and all this stuff, just keep on moving, you know, that would be where I got my pride of who I am.

When Synclaire talked about racism, she asserts that she didn't feel "held back or discriminated against." During the interview, Synclaire can't recall a specific instance, but had standard experiences. She discloses, "You're walking in the mall and people [store personnel] kind of follow you around in the store. I guess you just see that so often. It doesn't even phase me at this point." She attributes that the exposure she received from her grandparents allowed her to be in a diverse environment. She states, "I've always grown up, even with my grandparents and my mom, and we've always had friends of every race, creed, color, sexual orientation." She said, "racism hasn't affected me personally, but I know that racism exists." She explained:

Even though I went to school with mostly Black people growing up. I've never had or felt like my job was holding back [because of my race]. There [are] 15 people in my unit. It's 3 Black people, and we're all women, no men. I'm used to being in classes where I'm one of one or one of two, but I've never felt like that has held me back. I always felt that [racism] made me push myself because I want to bust down all the stereotypes of being Black. Being a female, being a single mom, you come with all these labels already attached to you and you are constantly knocking down doors anyway, some of the labels would still be attached whether I was Black or not, I'm still a female, I'm still a single parent, all these labels that come with it. I don't feel like I've been held back or discriminated against.

Success: I'm a work in progress. When I asked Synclaire if she thought she was a successful person, she stated that she considered herself successful, but is still a work in progress. She admitted:

There's always room to grow and be better and do better. I don't think anyone can just sit back on their laurels and just say okay, I've reached the top, that's it. There is no top, there's always somewhere else to go. If I had to define my successes right now, it would be [a work in] progress.

She felt that she has done a great job with Mackenzie and her community by influencing their lives. At some point she would like to go back to school and do some different things with her life.

At some point, I'd like to see myself back in school. I'd like to see myself maybe doing something in the same kind of area [social work], but a little bit different. I don't think I'm done, you know, and there's still some more for me out there. I think if I continue to discover about myself, find out more about myself and where my strengths and weaknesses lie and where I'm thinking I'm good at and not so good. I'll be able to convert that into something else and be even more successful in all areas. It's a work in progress.

She was very thankful for her daughter, family and friends and felt very blessed. In addition, she believed she has instilled the same qualities in her daughter and was proud that her hard work had come to fruition with Mackenzie.

I would like to consider myself a successful person, I have a really good job where I think I'm impacting not only the community, but people's lives. I've raised a kid that I'm inherently proud of. I have a good family support. I have great friends. You know, if you measure success by dollar amount then, probably not, but if you measure success by how you impact other people and the satisfaction you get from what you do and the satisfaction from enjoying your friends and family, then I'm Bill Gates! I love my job. I love what I do. I love my coworkers. My family is great. I don't have much to complain about as far as my life goes.

Synclaire expressed,

Yes, I do feel I have contributed to my daughter's current success. I tried to instill a very good work ethic. She understands that whatever she wants out of life, she's going to have to work to get in. She puts that forth every day. I've tried to instill in her a good personality and be respectful, treat people the way you want to be treated and I see that those things are manifested themselves on a

daily basis. I think the lessons that I've tried to impart to her, she's gotten them and she not only understands them but she tries to put them in practice, and by her doing that, she's constantly influencing people around her to want to do and be the same thing. She's always tried to give back and do things to help other people, she's really good about....looking out for herself, looking out for those around her. In that aspect, yeah, I think I have contributed to what she's been able to do thus far.

Synclaire admits that if she could change anything it would be her school choice in terms of public and private schools. She states, "I think maybe the only thing I would change, is that I may have looked at some different educational, different schools [private or charter]." Synclaire continues,

I might have researched some private or charter schools in the area, but I am glad how things turned out.

I might have leaned more toward some private schools, some of the charter schools we have in the area, for more smaller, one-on-one atmosphere. But then I think, if I had done that, would she have gone through where she was, be able to function where she is today and I don't know. All I know is that I've always been there from her first day at school and I will be there till her last first day of school and last day of school and so on, and always challenging her to challenge herself educationally.

I'm not really sure, I think sometimes maybe I would have done something differently but in the same aspect, I think, that if I had done something differently, things might not have turned out the way they are right now and I'm pretty satisfied with her educational success as they are right now.

Synclaire and Mackenzie maintain a close bond. As we interacted during our second interview, she revealed that her daughter called her the night before and wanted her advice on dealing with a male in her life. Synclaire recounts, "I told my daughter to tell her male friend to get with the program or get to stepping [Synclaire laughs]. My daughter deserves the best." Synclaire clarifies, "I told my daughter if he is not

supporting her and treating her like she needs to be treated, then she should not be interacting with him, she deserves better.” Synclaire is very happy that she was able to provide support to her daughter during her educational experiences. She admits that she may not have been able to support her daughter financially all the time, but was there for her in all other areas for support. It is at this time when she opens up about the involvement of her daughter’s father and shares some advice to single mothers who may have an absentee father.

I always worked really hard to try to be at everything she was in. I made sure that she got to participate in every club, activity or outing or whatever. There may have been times where financially we couldn’t do some of the other things that some folks were doing. Even at times when I financially couldn’t pay for it, my mom helped out a lot. Her dad helped out a little, very little. My family stepped up to the plate, tried to fill in the gap, as far as making sure that, especially when it came down to her school stuff, and being able to do activities and things for school, she was able to participate in that. It was a struggle. There were times when we did what we had to do, so she could participate and have money for different sorts of things. I don’t think there was ever a time when she missed out on anything educational wise due to either me not being able to financially take care of it or physically being able to take her there. There was always somebody who stepped up to the plate to make sure that she was able to participate fully.

Audra: How is her father? How is he in the picture?

Synclaire: As of right now, he’s not. And that is by a series of things that he did and then didn’t do and her decision at this point to not deal with that. Which I respect that. I’ve never run him down or said anything negative. I figured she’s a smart girl. You know it’s not going to take a rocket scientist to figure it out, so I don’t have to say anything negative because your actions are showing it for me. I don’t have to berate you or beat you down. However I can say I’ve always had a good group of male friends. I have brothers, co-workers, and god father, everybody who’s always given her a good male role model so she never felt that she had to go out and find somebody, a male, to give her, to boost up her self esteem, to give her a good sense of self. So, even though he hasn’t really been in the picture, there have been enough people where she is secure in who she is and she doesn’t need anybody, male or female, to justify who she is or boost her up.

It really hasn't been a big deal. In the beginning it was kind of, she kind of went through the "why does he not care enough?" "Why does he not want to be around?" "Why does he not want to do these things?" We had to talk about, it had nothing to do with her, it was just where he was emotionally, mentally, maturity wise that, like I always tell her, you can't control how people act, all you can control is how you behave to their actions. So she's gotten to the point now where it's like "I'd just rather not, I'm not going to be rude to you, if you call, I'll talk to you, but I'm not going to put forth any extra effort, I'm going to put forth just as much effort as you put forth and if you put forth zero, then I'll put forth zero and I'll be just fine regardless."

Audra: What would you say to mothers out there who may have a father who is not as involved?

Synclaire: I would tell them that it's okay. It will be okay. You find people, you build your circle, you find people around you that are good people and will be good role models and they will fill in the gap. If you take the time to really look at who you are surrounded with and you start surrounding yourself with, people who are trying to do or are doing the things that you want to be doing. You know whether they be a teacher, a counselor, or a coach, or a church member, one of your cousins, or a brother, whomever, nine times out of ten if you have good people around you, and good guys around you, they don't have to be fathers themselves, they just step up to the plate. I have a lot of Black friends who are male and they have really, really, really stepped up to the plate in as far as coming to her games when she was playing basketball, support her. They always ask how she's doing. They call her up to see how things are going. They talk to her about different things. When it came, when she got old enough, when it came to dealing with boys, and not falling into the stupid stuff that boys tell girls, they were just really, really supportive and there for her. You probably have somebody in your corner right now who would step up and they would step up without even you asking, you just have to make sure you put the right people around you and around your child to kind of fill that gap.

When you know better, you do better. College was an expectation in

Synclaire's upbringing. She came from a family where most of her relatives were college-educated. Since the majority of her elders were college educated, she knew she needed to be college-educated too. She divulged, "my mom has a college degree [and was in the military], my dad has a college degree, my aunt went to college, so my mom

would tell me ‘you really need to go to school.’” Her grandparents really fostered a love of learning in her. Based on this love, Synclaire enjoyed college and did not see it as a chore. She explains, “Going to college for me wasn’t a chore. I loved it, mentally. I loved going to school, I wish I could go back and do more schooling.” Her grandparents taught her that it [schooling] was about the actual process of learning and the value behind it. She recalled, “My grandfather used to say when you know better, you do better, and you help yourself and you can help others you know behind you.”

Well understand, because I started out going to school and then had a kid and that kind of went on the back burner, so I actually was putting myself through school while [my daughter] was in elementary and middle school. So, that also helped reinforce the fact, while she was doing her homework, I’m doing mine. She’s going to class, I’m going to class. It just kind of reinforced the fact that in order to do better and be better you have to go through these processes and it’s worth it in the end.

Through the love instilled by her grandparents and the encouragement from her mother she was able to learn a lot about education. This gave her the focus she needed as she raised Mackenzie.

You can’t take away my education. Synclaire discussed that education was important because she felt Mackenzie was born into a society that would judge her and her abilities based on her Black ethnicity. She explained to me, “You’re judged on the fact of your height, your weight, the color of your skin, where you went to school, how you speak, everything about you.” She wanted to instill in her daughter that she would have to work twice as hard, but under no circumstances could anyone take away the education she earned. She told Mackenzie, “you’re always going to have to work

harder, you're always going to have to be smarter, you're always going to have to be better and it's sad that it's that way, but that's the way it is." This is why she began talking about college with Mackenzie from the time she was a toddler. Letting her daughter know that education would provide opportunities for growth and advancement was always on Synclaire's mind. Mackenzie even had an idea of what she wanted to be when she was older: a basketball player, teacher, or coach.

Audra: Why was the topic of education important to you and your daughter?

Synclaire: The topic of education is important to me and my daughter because, unfortunately, we live in a society where before you even open your mouth, you've already been judged. As a single African American woman, raising a woman, I felt like I needed to make sure that she understood how important education was because you can judge me all you want to, but you can't take away my degree, you can't take away the education that I have. It gets you one step closer and one piece of the edge up on the competition. So if you don't go out and get your education, coming from a single parent household, this feeds into the stereotype, already people are going to think that you don't know anything. And that's one of the ways you get your foot in the door and that's one of the ways that you can control, you can call the shots, you can make the decisions, nobody else is going to determine, to an extent, what you're going to do and the things you want to have in life and how you want to live your life. The more education you have, the more opportunities you have to make that happen for yourself and [the] less other people can control how you're going to be. That was always important.

Audra: When did you begin to talk with your daughter about going to college?

Synclaire: Forever. I mean even when she was small, we would first talk about going to school. We talked about first you go to elementary school. Then after elementary, you go to middle school. After you go to middle school, you go to high school. Then you go to college and then if you want to go off after that, you can go get a master's degree and you can get a doctorate. I had to explain to her the difference between a doctor, like when you get sick and what a doctorate was as she got older, because she thought, "oh you get this and you automatically get to be a doctor." The conversation about going to college began when we first

started talking about going to school and was part of the conversation, college and then post grad work always, always.

Audra: Did your daughter know what she wanted to be when she was young?

Synclaire: Well, of course, she went through the whole thing of being little and not knowing what she wanted to do. First, she wanted to be a basketball player, cause she played basketball and then we had to break down the reality of, okay, you're not a boy, so this what you're limited to being a basketball player. Then she thought she might want to be a teacher and/or a coach, which is still not off the table. But as she got older and finding out what her interests really were, she's always going to be interested in sports and she's interested in medicine, but not to the point where she wants to go through all the stuff to be a doctor. She has figured out what she can do and actually incorporate the things she's actually interested in.

The conversations about college were necessary to Synclaire because of her perspective on how society would perceive Mackenzie. She used the expectation of college for Mackenzie as a way to make sure some type of opportunities would be available for her.

Be mindful, people are watching. Synclaire revealed that she had several conversations with Mackenzie regarding how people would have different expectations and would make assumptions based on the color of her skin. She explained, "We had conversations about people who are going to have different expectations, people are going to think that you are incapable of doing a lot of things. People are going to automatically assume oh, you're not going to be able to speak proper English." Synclaire added that she continued to talk with Mackenzie about who she is and where she came from, not just as a person, but also as a family. I told my daughter that, "we always had a strong racial identity as a family." She talked about the frustration of stereotypes and the internal anger she feels. She expressed, "you never see women in a positive light,

and there is no one to tell me ‘good job.’” She continues, “We need to talk about single mothers who are getting the job done and mothers need to realize that it ceases about you (the mother) and is all about your child.” She said of Mackenzie,

When she was in elementary school, it really never came up because her school was predominately African American, so it really wasn’t a big deal. As we got into middle school, and she was in a magnet program when she was one of two in the class, it’s where it really started to rear its head. I can actually remember one incident in middle school with one of her teachers where it came to pass that the Caucasian kids were passing his class and the African American kids were failing across the board, every one of them. That prompted some phone calls to the principal, and directors, and other parents getting involved. We found out there [were] some biases. He didn’t feel like these kids were smart enough to be in his class. He was holding the African American students to a totally different level and judging them definitely, more harshly and in the end left the school when it was all said and done. We’ve battled the whole time about making sure that her actions while in class, her actions while you’re in the hallway, her actions wherever she goes are against all those stereotypes. Be who you are, not saying to change and be somebody else, but always be mindful that people are constantly looking and judging and they’re going to think certain ways because, just simply the color of your skin and that’s the only thing they have to go on. That’s it.

Synclaire stated,

I constantly talked to her about how our family always had a strong racial identity. We always conducted ourselves accordingly, but we were not going to bow down to anybody. As a family, they gave her a little bit more, you know, straightened her spine. I come from people who, against all odds, my grandparents went to school back in the 20s and 30s back when that was pretty much unheard of. She has a history, genealogy, on her dad’s side, his family, a Reverend, his grandfather, they’ve got the spiritual build, you know who she is as a family and knowing who she is as a person, has pretty much helped her to navigate through that system. So I think, not just filling her head full of who we are as people as far as history goes, but who we are as far as our family goes, is I think, we’ve managed to keep her focused and not bow down when things got a little tough.

Synclaire believed constant talks about self and family were instrumental in Mackenzie being able to navigate the system.

Audra: When you say “navigate through the system,” what do you mean?

Synclaire: I mean, we’re sitting here, we’re having a conversation. You’re a professional. I’m a professional. We’re talking and there’s going to be things we’re going to talk about, but if we shut this recorder off and it’s just me as a friend and you as a friend sitting here talking, that’s totally different and you have to be able to turn it off and on. When I’m in my professional mode and I’m at work, I’m doing things, but when I’m with my friend, it is a whole entirely different situation. A lot of the kids don’t know how to turn that off and on and you have to. You have to know what’s appropriate and what’s not, what’s friend time and what’s business time and to be able to conduct yourself appropriately considering the circumstances. It’s navigating the system, weaving your way through, who’s who and what’s what and learn how to deal with people at their level and talk to different people and go through the system.

I remember when I was younger, my grandmother and aunts would correct our English and you didn’t say, if you go “where’s my book at?” they would correct your vernacular, so you grew up and I’d do the same thing, “really, did you hear what she just said?” So that you don’t accidentally set foot in a professional setting by letting your vernacular get a little too lax, it’s just those things that you have to be constantly aware of, all the time.

During the third interview, Synclaire shared another form of navigating the system by the naming of her child. She informed me that she gave her daughter a “White” name to mask Mackenzie’s racial identity so people won’t hold it against her. Synclaire passionately feels that White people look at a document (i.e. resume) and eliminate people who have a “Black” name. She continues, “It’s unfortunate that I had to give Mackenzie a “White” name, but that is my experience.” Daniel and Daniel (1998) support Synclaire’s experience by asserting that personal names can be a stimulus for

racial stereotyping and in the absence of color information personal names might be a primary basis for racial stereotyping.

Synclaire's dreams for her daughter. Synclaire would like for her daughter to graduate from college and give back to the community by being a productive citizen in our society. Currently, Mackenzie is on track with her degree plans to graduate in a year and half. Thus far, she is extremely proud of her daughter and the progress she has made in her college career. She is almost certain her daughter will go to graduate school one day to get her master's degree.

Synclaire: Well, there was never a doubt she was going to college. At this point, she's in college. I know she probably will be getting her master's degree. Of course I encourage her to get her Ph.D., but you know, after a while, I know school kind of, it might be one of those things where she works for a while and then goes back to get her degree. I know she's going to graduate college. She's very, very focused on what she needs to do. She's enjoying the college experience, but she knows what the end result is, so my goal is she get out of school, graduate, get her master's and be productive. That's the main thing, is just to be a productive citizen and then help somebody else who comes along behind you. You always have to bring somebody else with you, you know. That's pretty much my goal, that she finish school and just be a productive citizen of this United States.

Audra: So, do you feel that your dreams and aspirations match up to where she is currently in her education?

Synclaire: Actually, sometimes as a parent you don't give your kids credit. Her first two years at community college, going to school part-time and working, and so, this is her first year away and I admit I had some concerns about her being gone from my view, but her grades this first semester were excellent. I was really proud of the way she has been conducting herself, not just academically but across the board while she's been off at school, but then again, that comes back to instilling that, you know, in the beginning at home. You worry slightly, she's doing better than I expected. It wasn't as hard a transition as I initially thought.

Synclaire's final words to mothers. Synclaire was passionate about sharing

some words of encouragement with others mothers in the community. She expresses, “It's okay to worry, to cry, to feel lonely, to feel slightly insecure, to second and sometime third guess yourself. All those emotions and feelings are okay. The only thing that's not okay...is giving up.” Then she began to go over her list of things she wanted all mothers to know.

It's all about the child that is sitting in front of you. You owe them the best that you have and then some. There's going to be some struggles. There's going to be some times at night when you're not sure where the next anything is coming from, but you owe it to that kid to do the best you can by them.

Don't be scared to try something. Don't be scared to even fail. How are you going to know if you're going to get it right unless you get it wrong? And don't be afraid to share that with them. Tell them about the time when you weren't so successful. Let them know that it's okay to fall short sometimes, but you've got to get back up.

Let them know that you didn't always have it together, that you struggled through whatever it was you struggled through. Don't be ashamed of anything in your past. I mean, don't just tell them everything, but in context. Let them know that you are human. You are mom. You come in and swoop in and save the day, but you have your things that you're afraid of, you have your insecurities too, you have your things that make you worry at night and that you worry about them, and why you worry about them. And when you're getting on them or chastising them about something, don't just yell at them or scream or whatever, let them know why this is the way it is.

You have to build a strong bond, because the world is going to be constantly challenging everything you say and do. We have to keep on struggling and pushing through and making our kids be productive members of society and to give back and help somebody else along the lines, you have to, you have to.

Synclaire was able to address concerns of cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with Mackenzie through dialogue and participation. First, Synclaire had several conversations regarding how people have different expectations and assumptions

based on the color of Mackenzie's skin. Cooper (2005) asserted that in addition to mothering, Black mothers also must deal with equipping their children with the tools necessary to survive in a racist society. Synclaire revealed there was no way she could avoid the issue, she had to be truthful with Mackenzie and let her know it was a going to be a factor in her life as a Black female. She also used the sense of a strong racial identity that she received from her family and passed the knowledge down to Mackenzie in terms of knowing who she is. This allowed Synclaire to teach Mackenzie how to navigate the system of being able to function in both White and Black communities.

Second, Synclaire fostered self-esteem in Mackenzie which empowered Mackenzie to love and respect herself as a young lady. Synclaire did not want Mackenzie to end up pregnant, like she and her mother had. She also empowered Mackenzie by exposing her to different life experiences, for example traveling. She also encouraged Mackenzie to give back to the community that has supported her.

Finally, in terms of endurance Synclaire, wanted Mackenzie to be able to rely on her in any given situation; good or bad. She continued to encourage and support Mackenzie by consistently telling her how proud she was of her and her accomplishments. When Synclaire was unable to provide mentorship in the area Mackenzie needed, she found people to mentor and fill gaps in Mackenzie's life.

Synclaire's portrait highlighted the importance of college as the expectation and having a village. However, Synclaire's narrative also revealed the challenges of being a single mother, having an absentee father, and not having a hands-on mother during

childhood. In the middle of those challenges, Synclaire was able to find resources outside the home that proved beneficial for her daughter. She called those resources her village. The village consisted of various people in her life experiences that were able to provide support and encouragement to her and her daughter. In addition, her portrait revealed that the resistance to training our children to be college-educated can be dangerous, because it can interfere with opportunities for children to be successful in their adult lives.

By examining Synclaire's educational history and life experiences as a single mother, we can understand why college expectations can be important, beneficial, and rewarding for children and their parents, especially when these expectations are passed from generation to generation. Synclaire's portrait lets us know that in the middle of all the challenges and obstacles a mother faces raising a child; every mother should have her own "village." Ultimately, it was her willingness to share her intimate experiences, behaviors, and advice that made her the successful mother she is regarding her daughter's educational experiences.

Chapter Five: A portrait of Rachel (Some college)

“I wanted to be present for my daughter.”

Rachel was a challenge to interview, even after much probing, she never really lingered on or added much to her responses. She openly admitted she is very reserved and quiet. Rachel wanted to be different from her mother. She explained that she is not close with her mother and never has been. “No, we weren’t close because she really wasn’t there and my mom liked to party,” she reveals. Because of her mother’s lifestyle she and her siblings were able to do whatever they wanted.

We were pretty much free spirits, you know? We were able to do whatever we wanted to do. We really didn’t have any concrete set of rules or whatever. She was gone a lot. I don’t know; she really didn’t have too many sets of rules. We had to be home. Well, we should’ve been home, usually by dark and that was basically it.

When I asked her about her present day relationship with her mother, she responded, “It’s the same; we’re still not close.” I sensed the sadness and regret in her voice about how her relationship with her mother turned out.

I met Rachel Hunter a couple of years ago through a mutual friend. To be honest, we knew of one another, however we did not interact in the same social circles. When I sent out my recruitment email for single Black mothers, a mutual friend suggested that I contact her because she met the criteria for my research project. I was able to contact Rachel by phone and explained my study and interview process. I told her I would send her the consent form and interview questions for her review and then she could decide if

she wanted to participate in the study. We agreed to meet at my brother's house since it was a neutral spot in town. I conducted three one-hour interviews with Rachel.

In this portrait, I explored how Rachel's estrangement from her mother influences Rachel's experience as a single mother and shaped her thoughts and participation towards her daughter. In addition I identified the parental involvement of Rachel and explored the experiences, behaviors, and actions as she raised her daughter. First, the portrait highlights how Rachel communicated and interacted with Lakyn (her daughter) about education from early childhood through high school. Second, the portrait investigates if Rachel used any resources from outside the home regarding Lakyn's educational experiences. Finally, the portrait illustrates how Rachel addressed the concerns of racial identity, endurance and empowerment within herself and with Lakyn in the context of educational success.

Rachel is 47 years old and about 5'4" tall, with a small body frame. She has black hair and wears glasses. She has worked for the federal government since her early 20s. Rachel is currently married, but was not married while raising her daughter, Lakyn. Lakyn is 29 years old. She married after Lakyn had left for college. Rachel also has a younger daughter from another relationship. Rachel attended two semesters of community college then decided to enroll into court reporting school. Therefore, there was some exposure to learning outside of high school on a vocational level. When she arrived at my brother's house we engaged in small talk to break the ice. I sensed from her demeanor that she was nervous. As we engaged in small talk I told her that I was not

aware that she had a daughter with a college degree. Rachel proceeds to tell me that Lakyn has a bachelor's degree in Human Resources from a public university and will complete her Masters of Business Administration (MBA) in May 2011 from a private college. There is delight in her eyes as she talked about Lakyn.

Communicating and Interacting with Lakyn

Motherhood equals time and love. When I questioned Rachel about motherhood, she responded,

I did know that I wanted to be a mother who was present in Lakyn's life.

One thing I can say I have enjoyed is being a mother and something I wanted to be was a mother, not as young as I ended up being a mother though. I always knew that I wanted to be the type of mother that was present, that knew what was going on and talked to them [both daughters] about what was going on and make sure I was there at their different events because that's not something that I had. I think that was something I wanted and never had, so I wanted to make sure that I was that type of mother.

Since Rachel lacked her mother's presence during childhood, she made a commitment to be visible in both daughters' lives. I asked Rachel if she believed she was an effective mother, she replies, "I do." I probed and ask her how, she responded, "based on what my girls say." Rachel recalled a conversation she had with Lakyn:

My oldest [Lakyn] can tell you about how she thought some of the things back in the high school years were too strict and did not agree with. I was different than the other parents and stuff like that. But she says, as she went through her college years she understood why I did the things I did.

Rachel's goal as a mother consisted of making sure Lakyn had the things she needed and being a good role model for Lakyn.

I wanted to make sure they had the things they needed. I wanted to be good role model to them, so I had to be very careful as far as dating, as far as the type of people I had them around, and as far as whether or not I was going to go out partying. They watch everything you do and it's hard for you to do a certain thing and once they're at a certain age and want to do it, and you say, no, you can't do that, but "mom, you did it," so I was always very conscious of that.

Rachel was very careful about bringing men around Lakyn. She wanted to make sure she protected her. She tells me a story of a man that she dated. She explained, "I dated this man and he made the comment about how he could not date a woman with kids.

Needless to say, that date ended early. My kids are a package deal." She indicated through her demeanor and facial expression that her kids were her priority and it is important for her to set a good example.

My schools had a lot of resources. Rachel grew up in a small town in Texas. She explained, "education was all the town was about really and there wasn't much else to do outside of school." She spent a lot of time at school participating in various activities. In high school, she was part of the Biology Club, band, and the track team. She asserted, "Whatever was going on, that's where you went." Beginning in her elementary years, she attended predominately White schools.

They were very good schools. I must say that the schools were very well off. We wanted for nothing, we had everything. We never had to do fundraisers or anything like that, the school furnished everything. So it wasn't bad, not at all.

Rachel expressed that all the schools she attended from second grade to high school were good schools with a lot of resources.

Rachel's mother attended segregated schools and lived in a segregated community. When I asked Rachel how the city was segregated, she responds, "by railroad tracks." I was not able to gather any more information about her mother's school history. By her facial expression, it appeared she really did not like to discuss her mother. Rachel's school experience influenced her in a positive manner. She described, "I think it definitely makes a difference. All you have to do is really just focus on your grades and everything so there was no struggles or anything like that." When asked how these school experiences shaped what she wanted for Lakyn's education, she replied, "I think that is what made me want her to be in a diverse community because I think it makes a difference."

It was hard to send her off to college. When Rachel had to send Lakyn off to kindergarten, there were no tears.

I don't remember crying. She was in daycare probably from the time she was around 3 years old, so it was pretty much kind of the same thing. It wasn't too difficult for me because she always liked having books. She loved books, she loved writing, coloring, she liked being organized so she liked school all the time. It was an exciting time for her to get started in school. She was very excited about it.

However, when it was time for Lakyn to go to college, it was difficult for Rachel. Since she did not have a college experience, she was nervous about letting Lakyn attend college because it was uncharted waters for Rachel. Rachel is confident that the life lessons she taught Lakyn were instilled. However, since they are very close

it was hard to leave Lakyn at college and not be with her providing instruction. It was a good learning experience for Rachel. She learned to let go.

Now that was a little difficult, I myself didn't go to college, and so, it's kind of you hand your child off into this area that you didn't know and she was kind of far from home too. I was excited, but nervous, wasn't sure about the money situation either. We had the first year figured out, but from then on we really didn't. It was kind of stressful, but then on the other side, I guess it was kind of bittersweet.

Audra: Did you have any words for her? Did you say anything? Did you hug? Did you help her move in?

Rachel: Yes, I helped her move in. We packed up early that morning, loaded up the truck, got her situated. They had people at the campus that helped to carry out things because she just happened to be on the second floor. That was a very, very busy and long day. She was very excited until it came time for me to leave, then she didn't want me leaving and that's when all the tears came. She was really nervous about being away from home then. It's like she's always had a good head on her shoulders so I didn't really have too much worry about her getting into trouble and all that kind of stuff. I've always preached that stuff at home so I wasn't too concerned about that.

Rachel communicated and interacted with Lakyn in many ways during her childhood and adolescent years. First, Rachel took pride in being a present and visible mother in Lakyn's life. Since Rachel's mother was not present, she took it upon herself to make sure that she constantly had conversations on the importance of education.

Second, Rachel made sure she was a good role model for Lakyn by making sure Lakyn had the necessities she needed. Lakyn will most likely embrace the same traits as Rachel in terms of wanting to be a good role model for herself. In addition, Rachel was conscious of who she interacted with in the presence of Lakyn. Rachel felt it was

important to protect Lakyn and to participate in Lakyn's life to the degree that Laykn would know she was Rachel's priority.

Finally, Rachel believed that the life lessons she instilled in Lakyn as well as the conversation on the importance of college were helpful. Rachel consistently communicated to Lakyn that going to college would affect her standard of living in a positive way.

Resources outside the Home that supported Educational Experiences

School choice. When Lakyn began elementary school they were still in the small town where Rachel was raised. She recalled that in order to be in a good school, she needed to live in the right neighborhood.

I felt like she did get into one of the better schools. It's more or less about where you live at. That pretty much was the deciding factor. I chose where I wanted to live and at the time I also had a nephew that was already in the school so I was happy with that school.

When Lakyn started the second grade, Rachel moved to a urban area and placed her daughter in a school that was closest to the babysitter for convenience. Rachel was not happy and transferred Lakyn to her neighborhood school.

When I first got here, I had to put her in a school that was nearest to the baby sitter that I got for her. Now I wasn't that thrilled about that school, but once she got into the school in the neighborhood where we were living, I was very happy with that one, it was a very, very good school.

When Lakyn was ready to attend middle school, Rachel decided to move out of the urban area and into the suburbs because she was not happy with the school district in

the city. She felt by moving, Lakyn would have access to a better educational experience.

I moved to the suburbs at that point because I didn't really care for her to be in the [urban] school district because I knew which schools I didn't like, so I moved. At the time the suburb[an] middle school had really high standards for the schools and that really worked out well for us for middle school and high school.

I asked Rachel what qualities she liked in her daughter's middle and high school when she moved to the suburbs. She stated, "There were a lot of ways to be involved."

Rachel stayed involved with Lakyn's school as well. She explains,

I did not like the atmosphere of the parent teacher association (PTA), but I did a lot of the booster [work], a lot of fund raising, and you know different organizations like that.

She [Lakyn] was always wanting to be very active and wanting to be in all kinds of stuff, so, she was in sports, she was a cheerleader, she was in band, so she just always stayed active in different clubs and stuff like that and she's always been an overachiever. Anything going on, she was in the mix. In high school, the same thing also, I think, the suburb [an] school district has very good counselors, from the ninth grade all the way to high school they emphasize getting them ready for college. The information is there just get in contact with the counselors and she did, she stayed in contact with the counselors, she liked a lot of her teachers, she was very active there, she was a cheerleader, color guard, band, I mean she was just in everything, who's who, everything, she was involved in a lot of stuff.

Rachel believed her school involvement gave her the tools she needed to be able to support her daughter when she was ready to move to college. Rachel is grateful for the high school counselors that provided support and provided necessary information that Lakyn needed to prepare for college.

My job was a blessing. During the second interview with Rachel, I asked her how she was able to remain focused when she became pregnant. She revealed that

Lakyn's father did not play an active role in her life. She did not go into detail at all.

However she did say,

Lakyn's grandmother and aunts were active in her life, she knows about his side of the family.

When I got pregnant with Laykn, it was the summer after I graduated high school. It was very difficult for me because I had planned on going on to college myself, which meant that I wasn't going. I had moved to Houston, which meant I had to go back home, come back to the country, which was very hard to do. I don't know, once I got back home, I had to really refocus, figure things out, how am I going to do this, how am I going to take care of this child, things like that. I was very fortunate to get the job that I did. I got that job because some friends were going to apply for it and they asked me to go along and I got the job; they didn't. Anyway, that was, you know, kind of a blessing in itself, I don't know, just having the type of job that I did, just opened my eyes to a lot of things, and the amount of money I was making enabled me to do a lot of things had I not gotten that job. I was working at a small convenience store, I never would have been able to, well, let's not say never, it would have been a lot harder. That job made it easier for me to do [support Lakyn].

Although Rachel was grateful she had a good job, working outside the home did affected Lakyn because they moved to a new town with no family members.

Working outside the home at times it did affect it [her relationship with Lakyn], I would say, when I moved. I didn't really know anyone and I didn't have a family up here so I had one close friend and that was it, which was helpful but that was really hard on my daughter when I first moved up here you know, is not having that family around anymore. Had I had it to do that all over again, I probably wouldn't have done it.

To make up for not having family in town, Rachel and Lakyn did various activities inside and outside the home. Inside the home, Rachel recalled,

She was always interested in books.

She was not into reading, but doing different activities and stuff like that. Over the summers, I always made sure that I would get the workbooks for whatever

grade she was in, make sure that she did something having to do with keeping up with the school work, stuff like that.

Audra: How about outside the home, what kind of activities did you all do? Did you travel?

Rachel: When she was younger and not so much, the traveling, it was within Texas, little road trips here and road trips there, visited Houston a lot because I did have family there so we spent a lot of time there.

Audra: Did you ever go to the zoo, or the parks?

Rachel: Oh yeah. The park is something that we probably did almost every weekend. We did the zoos, we did the recreational parks like Astroworld, Six Flags, Sea World, places like that.

Audra: Did you get on the rides with them?

Rachel: Yeah, just about everything but some of the faster roller coasters, but everything else, yeah, I did. But then, I was a young mother too (smiles). We also did lots of shopping, cause she liked to shop, so yeah, we did lots of that.

Even though Rachel was in a different town, she was able to find activities in the new city for her and Lakyn that helped them bond better. Although she missed home, she was her family.

Family was a big support group for me. Family and friends played a huge role in helping Rachel care for Lakyn during her educational experience.

Oh God, yes. My friend's family was a big, big support group for me. Her mom started babysitting for Lakyn when she was about 3 years old. I think she had her up until she was like 8 years old. Then, when my friend and I moved to [this city] together, then she baby sat for me also and then she had a cousin who came, so she's been a part of that family, they've been a big help to me. When I was in my hometown, my two sisters, they were a big help. One of my sisters then moved to the same city I resided [in] and she was a big help also.

I asked about the involvement of her daughter's father. She explained that he chose not to be involved.

Audra: What role did her father play?

Rachel: None.

Audra: Does she know her father?

Rachel: She knows him, but he chose not to [know her].

However, his family had a relationship with Lakyn. She revealed, "His mother and aunts were very active in her life and she knows the entire side of her father's family." By her demeanor, Rachel appears to be at peace that there was no father involvement and is grateful family and friends were there to help her out in her time of need.

Rachel used resources outside the home to help with Lakyn's educational experience. First, Rachel was fortunate to attend schools that had many resources. Rachel did not have the burden of being in unsafe and substandard schools that a lot of Black students experience (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Rachel was able to focus on her grades and have a very positive school experience. By understanding the importance of being in a good, Rachel made sure Lakyn had the same experience.

Second, Rachel chose where she wanted to live and made sure she chose the neighborhood with good schools. When she relocated to different city; she did not choose to live in the best neighborhood and was regretful. However, when Lakyn started middle school Rachel chose to move to the suburbs where schools were strong academically. This agrees with Holme (2002) who asserts parents beliefs about which

school districts that aren't good is an important factor in deciding where to live. She remained in that area until Lakyn graduated. Rachel had a solid job that served as a resource financially to her children.

Finally, family and friends played a huge role helping Rachel care for Lakyn during her educational experience. She was able to rely on her sister, friends, and Lakyn's father's side of the family, even though Lakyn's father chose not to participate. Rachel is grateful her family and friends took an active role mentoring Lakyn.

Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success

I knew I was Black when I went to school. Rachel realized that she was Black and different when she entered the second grade. She recalls, "I grew up in a predominately White town, the school was predominately White, very few Blacks." She explains that they did not have kindergarten in the school while growing up. "A neighborhood teacher taught kindergarten in her house." Then when she reached first grade she attended an all-Black school, but was taught by a White teacher. She said, "that was probably the first time where I've actually been in the presence of a White person that much." Then in second grade, she was moved into another school.

In second grade they closed my school and I was integrated into the other school that's definitely when I knew for sure I was Black. Yeah, it was the skin color, the hair, definitely the way they dressed. I don't remember anything negative being said or done, going into the school, but it was definitely noticeable that you were different. It was definitely noticeable.

Rachel also shared a different and interesting perspective of realizing she was Black based on parent interaction.

You saw a lot more of the interaction with the parents also than you did with the Black children. That was different.

Audra: When you say interaction with the parents, what do you mean?

Rachel: Well you would see their parents [the white students] at the school, they'd be up there for this, up there for that, and you didn't really see that with the Black parents.

On the topic of racial identity, Rachel did not separate it from realizing she was Black.

When I bring up racism, she asserts racism did not affect her negatively.

I don't see it [racism] as ever being anything negative, for me. I can't say that I've experienced a lot of the negativity. There has been some, but, I can't remember anything really bad.

However, Rachel felt that integration was a good experience for herself and her childhood community.

I think it was definitely a good thing being integrated and not being just in your community, especially in your adult years. I think it's really important to have your children mixed in a diverse community before they're adults because, once, you have these adjustments once you graduate high school and especially if you're going off to college and stuff like that because it's going to be integrated. And if you've always been in one community, you don't have just that adjustment of the grades and how the teaching is, you also have that integration, you know, being around people that are different than you and how they're going to react to you. You have to look at that when you go into the working atmosphere and stuff like that. It's diverse. It's not just your people. In most instances it's going to be diverse.

Rachel expressed that integration gave her a well-rounded experience that she was able to pass along to her daughters.

My mother wasn't big on education. Rachel revealed, "I lived with just my mom and she was not big on education." Since Rachel's mother did not advocate for

education, the topic was rarely discussed in the household. Ironically, Rachel loved to read and study.

She [Rachel's mother] didn't even graduate from high school. I think she stopped probably at the 10th or 11th grade when she had my oldest brother and so she was not big on education. That was my thing, I had always loved reading and studying and this was just something I did on my own.

Rachel revealed that she and her siblings were alone during her childhood.

We were out there on our own. My mother, she didn't graduate from high school. She did go back later on and get her GED. She did go to school for nursing. She didn't even go as far as being a LVN. She went just enough to be able to work. She was going to nursing school when I was in high school, so she was gone a lot. She worked nights and during the day she was gone to school, because there wasn't a school in our city, so she had to travel and by the time she got back, she went to work. We all went in the right direction. None of us got into any kind of legal trouble, arrested or anything like that. I'm very close with my brothers and sisters, so we have a very close bond. We all did well.

Although, there was minimal parental involvement, Rachel and her siblings were able to stay out of trouble. Rachel admitted she stayed involved in school activities, which kept her out of trouble.

The benefits of going to college. Rachel stated, "As long as I can remember, I talked to her about the importance of school." She wanted Lakyn to understand the benefits of going and how getting a college degree would influence Lakyn's standard of living.

I tried to make her understand the differences and the benefits of going and not going. As far as how you want to live your life, I know for me, I was fortunate that I did get a government job so the money was there [so that] I could still support her, my other daughter without struggling. I did make her understand that the kind of job that I had, especially nowadays, is not there anymore.

Audra: How did she respond?

Rachel: She understands it. I know when she was in college she took an economics class and that was eye opening for her and trying to get them to understand what their future was going to look like as far as you know, the social security system, the pensions, and all that kind of stuff that my generation had. Their generation, they don't have that to look forward to. So they have from the time they start working, they have to look at saving up for their retirement and everything because they're not going to have the same system that we have.

Rachel felt it was important to talk with Lakyn about education because she was not able to have the college experience.

I guess for me, maybe, because I didn't get to go [to college] it was very important to me and I didn't have anybody to really talk to me about it or help me with it. I mean there's a lot more as far as resources out there now than when we were in school and the town that I grew up in, there were a few of the women that tried to reach out to the people that they thought would be able to go. I had a few that did try to reach out to me, but, it just didn't fall into place. I did leave and move to Houston right after graduation so that was probably something else I probably shouldn't have done. However, she [Lakyn] was always interested in things and she was always very outgoing on her own also, so it made it easy.

By having some exposure to education after high school and understanding that a college degree could give Lakyn more opportunities, Rachel consistently had conversations with Lakyn about college. Since Rachel was unable to take advantage of opportunity of going to college, she did not want Lakyn to miss out on the opportunity.

The day she came home crying. I asked Rachel if she ever talked to Lakyn about race and racial identity. She mentioned the day Lakyn came home crying.

Now, she did experience it. I think after moving to the city I know there was an incident, where in the neighborhood where we lived, there weren't very many Black children, and so she's always been the real friendly type, and so she played with anybody, but there was a group of girls who targeted her because she was different. I can remember her coming home crying because one of the little girl's mother had been really mean to her at their house or whatever. I do remember that. I remember her being made fun of because they felt like she had a big butt,

and you know, just stereotypical stuff like that where they knew she was different.

Audra: And what did you say to her?

Rachel: Well, you know, I just had to explain to her how everybody's different and it didn't mean just because you're Black that you have a big butt. Maybe we have a little more curves than most White people or Hispanic people, but there are some that are curvy, it's just different with different people.

Audra: What strategies worked best and what strategies didn't work when you were trying to talk to your daughter about being different?

Rachel: I don't know, I think that is the most prevalent to me, that incident, you know.

Audra: If a mother came to you and said "hey my daughters having this problem," what advice, what strategy would you have for that mother?

Rachel: Well, my thing is, the type of person that you are, is more important than the race that you are. I try to focus more on that than the color of your skin. You could see the differences also from middle school, when they were going from middle school to high school she had friends whose parents didn't want them hanging out anymore even though they'd been together all these years, because they didn't want their daughters dating Black guys, so therefore, if they're hanging with the Black girls, the Black guys are around too. She had to experience that too, which was wrong. As the years go by, they see the differences didn't make any difference because they were going to do what they wanted to do anyway.

I did what I had to do. Rachel considers herself a successful person. Her success is focused on her two daughters. She explained, "Well, I think as far as raising my children, I think I've been successful at that. I think they're both well rounded. They know the importance of education, and did not get into trouble." When I asked Rachel how she's contributed to Lakyn's current success, she replied, "By the standards that I brought her up in." Rachel's main focus was to be supportive. She said, "I tried to be

supportive of what she wanted to do and make sure that, you know, I did everything that I could to help her to get to where she wanted to be.” In addition, Rachel got a second job to support her daughter financially for college.

I actually ended up getting a second job. I got a part-time job for a little while and then, that was a little hard because I did have a 7 year-old at home at the time, and so I didn’t like having to leave her with the sitter so much; so then after I felt like I was comfortable with the part-time job and we had enough to pay for this semester and next semester coming up or whatever. I did sell Avon for a while because I could stay at home and she [second daughter] could go with me to do whatever I had to do and that helped out too, so I did have to supplement in other ways.

Audra: Were there times when you were unable to provide support for your daughter during her educational experience?

Rachel: No, I think as far as being there, I was there as much as I could be there and I did what I could do for sure financially, so I would say I was supportive.

Audra: Was there ever a time when you wished you would have been there, but you had to miss?

Rachel: The only time I can think of is during the college years, it was hard for me to get there at times because I did work weekends and so I would have to miss things because of that.

Although Rachel did what she had to do in order to support Lakyn, she did reveal that she wished she could have been better prepared for college.

I think I could have prepared better for college, I mean, if I’d known the things that I know now I would have known how to save and stuff for her, because I was making good money in my early 20’s and didn’t even think about it at that time.

Rachel realized how important it was for her to be supportive of her daughters, because of the estranged relationship she shared with her own mother. The look in her eyes told me she did not want Lakyn to have the same experience.

Be involved with your children. Rachel wanted Lakyn to get a college degree and to pursue her own dreams. She explains, “I wanted her [Laykn] to pursue whatever field she wanted to be in. So she did meet the dreams and aspirations I have for her.”

Rachel’s advice to all mothers was to be involved with their children.

The number one thing is to be involved and as they get older, especially the high school years transitioning into the college years, a lot of children think because they’re 18 they’re grown, and say “okay, I don’t have to.” I think they need us more during the transitioning years than any other time. They really need us because it’s so much, that transition is a lot bigger than what people think.

I was very strict. I liked having my girls with me. I like knowing where they are, what they’re doing at all times. Of course you have to start pulling back in the high school years, give them a little freedom cause you don’t want them to go buck wild when they leave home, so start giving them little by little, giving them more and more freedom through the high school years, especially the senior year.

Audra: Is there anything else you’d like to add for all the mothers in America?

Rachel: My main thing is be present, be a part of their lives and let them know how much you love them and that you care about them and you care about what they’re doing.

Rachel addressed concerns of cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with Lakyn through dialogue and engagement. When Rachel had conversations with Laykn concerning race and racial stereotypes she tended to focus on Lakyn as a human rather than a Black female. According to Turnage (2004) Black mothers often help their daughters face negative messages that are often directed at Black females. To empower Lakyn, Rachel consistently remained supportive and active in Lakyn’s life and extra-curricular activities. Rachel also had to learn to let go and trust that everything she

taught Lakyn would be instrumental in helping Lakyn to be a responsible and productive member of society.

Rachel's portrait highlighted the importance of not passing negative experiences down to one's children. Rachel's narrative revealed the challenge of having an absentee mother and raised herself and then became a single mother as well. Despite coming from a household where Rachel's mother was not available, Rachel was still able to be exposed to some college and vocational training. This allowed her to get a good paying job and to provide financial support for Lakyn. In addition, this portrait revealed that although Rachel did not have a blueprint for motherhood, she broke free from her own mother's patterns.

By examining Rachel's educational history and life experiences without the supervision from a parent, we can understand why taking a different path from her upbringing proved to be rewarding for the life her daughter is currently living. Rachel's portrait let us know that being present in our children's lives is a rewarding experience. Ultimately, the decision that Rachel made to not follow in her mother's footsteps has made all the difference in her daughter's educational experience.

Chapter Six: A portrait of Megan (Master's degree)

“I’m a Survivor!”

I met Megan during our first interview when she agreed to participate in my research study. I sent Megan a consent form and a copy of the interview questions through email. I interviewed Megan three separate times for about an hour each time. We agreed to meet in her office for privacy. When I arrived we engaged in small talk as I tried to make a connection with Megan. She openly admitted that she was at a place in her life where she was open to sharing her experiences and her story. She expressed, “If you would have asked me a couple of years ago, I would not have been able to talk about my experiences. I was ashamed, but I am so over it now.” Her statement immediately put me at ease and I could sense that she had a lot to share.

Megan is 46 years old and works for the city. She is approximately five feet five inches, with a medium build with a soft brown complexion. She greeted me with a firm handshake and smile. As I took a seat in her office, I noticed that her office was bare. The walls were white with one or two pictures. There was this brown shelf with several white folders with data. She had a bulletin board behind her chair with various charts and papers. I noticed that she has one or two pictures of her children. I said to her, “This is definitely an accountant’s office.” Megan laughed and replied, “My hall of fame is at home.”

Megan was born in the southeastern part of the United States. She received her bachelor’s degree in accounting from a historically Black university (HBCU) and her

master's degree online in Accounting. Megan reveals, "I started out majoring in music only to realize that I did not want to teach and I did not think I would have a successful career in music." In addition, she said that she really enjoyed her HBCU experience and is a member of an historically Black sorority. I told to her that I am a member of Delta Sigma Theta, another historically Black sorority and we had an instant connection of sisterhood. Megan is a divorced mother of two children: one daughter and one son. She and her ex-husband separated and divorced when her daughter entered middle school. Although divorced, Megan's ex-husband has remained an involved parent with both children. Her daughter, Courtney, is a sophomore at a historically Black university (HBCU) majoring in Architecture. The summer before Courtney's freshman year, she was admitted into a program at the HBCU that will allow her to finish with a bachelor of science and a master of science in Architecture in four years. Megan was very proud of her daughter. She said, "Courtney has a 3.5 grade point average and I am very happy of her academic grades."

In this portrait, I explore the importance of endurance and determination and how these characteristics influenced the educational experience of Megan's daughter. In addition, I identified the parental involvement of Megan and explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions as she raised her daughter. The portrait highlights how Megan communicated and interacted with Courtney (her daughter) about education from early childhood through high school. Second, the portrait investigates if Megan used any resources from outside the home regarding Courtney's educational experiences. Finally,

the portrait illustrates how Megan addressed the concerns of racial identity, endurance and empowerment within herself and in the context of Courtney's educational success.

Communicating and Interacting with Courtney

A mother can't be selfish. Megan described motherhood as encompassing love and unselfishness. She explained:

I see an individual [mother] who is loving. This person can't be a selfish person. This person must be willing to give up the smallest amount of food that is on their plate to their child. A mother is someone that is willing to be unselfish, caring, loving, and supportive to [her] child.

Megan felt she was an effective mother but claimed there is no specific formula for motherhood.

I think that I tried to be effective. You know, it's not like I was handed a book and that said, "This is the way motherhood is." I'm only taking what I have seen through my mom of how to raise a child. So I'm not perfect when it comes down to motherhood, so I just try to do my best.

Megan's main goal as a mother was to be a productive member of society and ensure Courtney received the support she needed from her mother.

As a mother, my goals were just to make sure that my child or children, one particular, my daughter, was getting the support she needs from me as a mother. My goals are also to financially support her and make sure she stays healthy. To make sure she gets the best education and make sure that she grows up to be a respectful woman that I would want her to be and then when she is grown, still be able to have that support coming from her mother.

From Megan's perspective, supporting Courtney and ensuring that she received the best education would enable her to meet her own goals as well.

I pushed my daughter. Megan realized, in retrospect that she should have taken her high school years more seriously. She revealed, “I realized that I wasted valuable time.” She remembered that she was good in chemistry but had no interest in the subject.

I did have one subject-that was chemistry-that I didn’t even have to study for. I just went in there and made As in that class. Matter of fact, my teacher separated me and put me over in the corner to take a test by myself because he didn’t want anybody else to copy off my paper. At that time, I said that was my calling and I should have kept going with chemistry, but like I said, because I didn’t have no interest [in school].

With Courtney, Megan developed a new attitude on educating her daughter. She recalled, “I can say by me not taking education as important as I should have, I really did push it [education] on her.” Megan began to question Courtney about colleges and what majors she thought she would be interested in based on how she performed in certain subjects at school.

If I felt like she had a gift in math or science, or she was doing really well in English, then you know, I had her to think about, what do you want to do with yourself in the world. What do you want to be, because I see that you have a gift in English or math? With her it was math. At that time she just threw out some things. I tried to get her to think on majoring at that [math], you know, when you go to college, maybe you should think about being an engineer or math teacher or something that has to do with numbers or, you know, I never did try to say accounting, because that was up to her. I said, you need to make sure you study. I even gave her study time when she got home.

I also wanted her to be well rounded, so sometimes she didn’t want to participate in sports, but I said you need to try it, just try it and see if you like it. Because she went to a Catholic school, it was small and they didn’t have that many students, you made the team; it wasn’t like there was a tryout. I got her into that, she was good in running track, but didn’t like it, so I at least said, okay, once you started

something, you don't quit, but you're going to finish it out and once you finish it out, you don't have to do it again. With track, she ran it for two years even though she didn't like it, but because she made it to the Junior Olympics, that kept her going for the next year, but after then she said, "That's it, I'm not doing it again."

As for school, education, even with math, even though she was good at it, her teachers saw that in her and had to push it as well, "I see a gift. You are really good in math and I'm going to have some students that are going to do advanced math while other students are doing regular math." So once he told us that, I'd make sure she would come home in the evening time, do her homework before TV, and pushed her in areas she was doing well in.

Megan felt that exposing Courtney to different things and asking questions to get her to think about education and beyond, proved to be helpful when Courtney got ready to enter college.

I wanted her to take education seriously. Megan wanted Courtney to take education seriously because she had not in her high school years. Megan did not want Courtney to take for granted the opportunity to learn and be educated.

I have to go back to where I spoke about how I didn't take it [education] seriously. I just went to school. Not that I didn't enjoy going, because I enjoyed going to school but it wasn't for the education until later on in life when I was in college, when I started taking education seriously. I wanted her to immediately take it seriously and let her know that this is [education] something. We did talk about both sides because some people take whatever they're interested in now and they stick with it for the rest of their lives and then some people go so far as college and once they graduate they change everything, their whole career and everything. We talked about both ways the way education can follow you and be a part of your life and how it is important in your life.

Megan felt that if she were able to talk to Courtney and instill in her the importance of education she would be successful in her endeavors. She claims, “I am so proud of her academic accomplishments in college.” This implies that Megan is glad Courtney took education seriously. Megan began to talk about college when Courtney was in high school.

When it was decided which high school she was going to go to, that’s when I started talking to her about college. That’s when I felt like, okay, you’re going to start taking the ACTs, SATs. In Catholic school they always talked about how they pre prep the children for college courses, so I wanted that same feeling in the public high school so we started talking about college then. Well, the public high school is really not going to pre prep so you’re going to have to do that yourself. Once I learned that they had AP [advanced placement] and Pre-AP classes, that’s what she got into and that did help her to prepare for college as well.

Megan corrected her priorities by instilling the importance of taking education seriously in her daughter. This new perspective on the education allowed Megan and Courtney to participate and to prepare for college.

I had to let go. When Megan sent her daughter off to kindergarten she admits that she was scared, but Courtney took the experience really well.

I was so scared. My baby, she’s going to school for the very first time. She actually started pre-k, when she was 4 years old. It’s so funny because when we got out of the car, dad had the video camera in his hand, he was filming her and I was making sure that everything was right, her hair, her clothes, because she went to a Catholic school so I was making sure her uniform was all straight and neat. She turns around and she says “Mom, Dad, you’re embarrassing me!” [laughter] I was like, oh my goodness, am I really? Do I really look like a fool standing out here with a video camera, filming my child? But I wanted to capture that moment. To her, it was the first day of school it was no big deal.

When it was time to send Courtney off to college, Megan was scared and unsure if Courtney was ready. She recalls,

I didn't think she was ready to go to college.

I didn't feel like she was ready to go off to college, and when I say that, I mean to experience some of the things that occur in college life. I felt like that I still had to show her so much when I didn't let her experience different things, so here you go, she's off to college. I tried to think, did I tell her about this? Did I tell her about that?

I tried to remember and make sure that I told her about certain things that could happen on campus. I still didn't feel comfortable enough that I had told her everything. So even though I was scared for her to go off to college, I had to tell myself to just let go, let go and let her experience. I wanted her to gain that experience that I had and going off to college was something I enjoyed doing. I learned a lot. I gained a lot of independence. I felt like it was something she needed to do even if she returned back home after a year or two, she needed to go off and grow up.

In the end Megan, realized that she had to let go and trust what she had taught Courtney during her childhood and adolescent years. Megan knew that in order for Courtney's to grow, she must experience college on her own terms.

Megan was able to communicate and interact with Courtney in many ways regarding educational success from early childhood through high school. Although Megan did not take school seriously in her adolescent years, she strongly encouraged Courtney to take her education seriously. Meagan encouraged Courtney by making sure she nurtured the areas that Courtney was strong in academically. In addition, she wanted Courtney to be well rounded and supported her participation in sports as well. Megan

also continuously questioned Courtney to stimulate her thought process concerning college and beyond. Finally, Megan was able to discuss her own school experience with Courtney to provide a perspective on the importance of education and the opportunities it would provide in Courtney's future.

Resources Outside the Home That Supported Educational Experiences

School choice. During Courtney's elementary years, Megan, and her husband at the time, wanted Courtney to have the best opportunity to receive the best education. After discussing things as a family, they decided that Courtney would attend a private Catholic school.

Her dad and I knew that we wanted her to get the best education so what we did was after two years of living in one area, we decided to look for a house in the neighborhood that had the best education. We moved to that area, and we said, okay, this is where we want her to attend school, but we decided, I think we want a tutor also. We kept going back and forth between the school that we had moved close to and a Catholic school, and the Catholic school ended up winning because the program they had at that time. So from pre-K all the way to the 8th grade she attended Catholic school and it was the same school.

I asked Megan what programs were offered. She replies, "They had all the basic disciplines; math, English, science, and even Spanish. They started all these subjects from Pre-K all the way to eighth grade." However, when it was time for Courtney to attend high school, she wanted to attend a public school. Megan was hesitant, but eventually allowed Courtney to go to a public school.

I wanted to send her to high school, to a Catholic high school, but she asked me and begged me "momma, please can I go to public school?" So golly, I struggled with that because I didn't want to pull her. I finally decided at the last minute, it

was like two weeks before public school started to let her go ahead on and attend the public school.

I asked Megan why she finally decided to let Courtney attend a public high school.

I met other people that had also taken their kids out of Catholic school. I spoke with them and asked them how was their kids were doing. Some had good opinions about it and some didn't. And then I even spoke with principals that were in the public school district and they actually told me "you need to keep your child in Catholic school." It boiled down to me letting her do something that she wanted to do, just this once. And that's what it boiled down to. She could do it. She could handle it. Her grades were not going to drop and that's one of things I explained to her, if your grades drop below a B, I'm going to take you out. So we promised each other that I would keep her in and she promised she would still keep her grades up and that's what happened. That's what made me decide to go ahead and give it a chance, let her do it.

Once again, it came down to Megan letting her daughter gain an experience that was uncomfortable for Megan. In the end it was about letting go of the fears Megan had and watching her daughter grow.

I hated to leave my kids. Megan's job required her to travel a lot and be away from her children. She said, "I guess I was angry inside because I had to leave my kids." She knew she had to leave, but just hated to leave her children behind. She talks about working outside the home:

Yes, there were quite a few things that affected me. I know the kids. The only reason they accepted it was because they got to eat out a lot because their dad didn't cook. It was like momma's leaving for this week so we get to eat out this week. I think that's the only thing that they enjoyed about it. When I left you could always tell two days or the day before it was time for me to take a trip I would have so much anger inside because I had to leave my kids. It's not that I wanted to be mad or pick an argument or wanted to fuss, but it was like

something I had to either complain about or fuss about. I think that was my way of telling me I didn't want to go, I was angry, even though I had to go, it was part of my job. I guess I was so angry I just took it out on my family and I would think of anything to complain about or fuss about.

I wanted to always leave the house clean so all they had to do was get up in the morning time and just, you know. I would iron the kids' clothes. I would try to have the snacks there for them. I had so much to do before I left and I guess that kind of frustrated me too and made me madder and madder because I knew I had to do this, this, this, and that. If someone got on my nerves I would just smack them, I would snap. As soon as I would hit the airport I would miss them. I would call home and say I love you, and wish I was back at home. As soon as I got back home, I felt better and I would rush and try to hurry up and do everything so I wouldn't have to stay the full term they had me planned for that trip. I would try to rush it, hurry up and come back so I could be back home with my family.

It affected me a lot. It really did and I can't believe that I put in five and half years of it, and I think that's, it took a great part, it affected my marriage a lot for sure. With my kids I can say that it was just missing them [and] them missing their mom.

Based on my conversations with Megan, she was not happy about leaving her kids when she was required to work out of town. She wanted to be present in their lives at all times.

To substitute her absence, Megan eventually hired a nanny for the kids.

He [children's father] cared for them and then we got a nanny. Then the nanny would pick up the kids from school, she would bring them home, she would feed them, make sure they did their homework and then that's when he would come and get them and then they would stay with him.

I commented that having a nanny is an interesting dynamic and I asked Megan how she decided to get a nanny for her children.

The kid's dad worked full time and had a part-time job, it was more of a hobby, but he was earning money doing it. Because he liked to be in that sport environment, he would umpire games and he didn't feel like he should give that up because of me traveling. I wanted the kids to start having home cooked meals because they would either go to Luby's restaurant or they would get pizza or something like that. There were times when I would be gone for an entire week but then there were also two weeks where I would just come home for the weekend and head back out. We decided to get a nanny to help out with some of those responsibilities of keeping the house clean, making sure the kids did their homework, [to] let him go and do his umpiring.

Basically, she [nanny] was there to try to keep the house up to par before I would come back because it would be a disaster. Not a disaster. He [the dad] would try to pick up a little bit here and there, but she did the things that I would do if I was at home.

Since Megan's ex-husband played such an active role in their children's lives, I asked Megan if the children ever got the notion that their parents would reunite. Megan disclosed:

You know, I never felt that from my kids. But my daughter is actually the one that said, "Mom, I think it's best that you all get a divorce." Because kids can feel it, they can feel the vibes, they can hear, even though you try not to speak in front of them about certain things or fuss and fight, they know that that loving that they once saw with a relationship is no longer there. So my daughter, she has always felt like "no, don't get back with Dad" and I think it's because my daughter was with me when we actually caught him in action. I think that's one of the reasons why she doesn't want me to have to go back through that again.

My son was there too, but he was asleep, in the car, people tell you all the time that things happen for a reason and I tell you, we were headed to go in one direction, but my instincts just told me to go in another direction and she was in the car at the time. I think that's the reason why she has that feeling where, we talked all the time about how much a woman can put up with and what you should and should not put up with. I had to set an example for her and let her

know that I'm asking you not to put up with so much and be in such a mentally, physically rude relationship where it bothers you so much you get sick and things like that. I have to live up to that and that's what I'm trying to set the example. She told me too, because I did one time, want to hold it together for them and she's the one that advised me to just let go.

As I listened to Megan tell the story of catching her husband (at the time) being unfaithful, I sense a bittersweet moment for Megan. She is no longer married, but her ex-husband has remained committed to being active in his children's lives. I share with Megan that I understand to some degree because, I am no longer in a relationship with the father of my child, but he does remain committed to our daughter. She looks at me and shakes her head and in that moment no words need to be expressed. In addition, her children supported her decision to leave the marriage in order for Megan to be at peace mentally and emotionally.

She was exposed to activities outside the home. In the home, reading was a major activity that Megan participated with her children. She expresses, "We were always reading. Their dad loves to read as well. We always had something that we were reading and we read to them as well at night." Megan revealed that the majority of the activities with their children were done outside the home.

We also took them to, outside the home, different museums. We didn't even care if they were interested, we still, like you say, forced them to go. Letting them see what's out there, what's available on the Black and White side of town, and then they had to read about the places we visited.

Megan also went on trips with Courtney to expose her to different environments as well.

Megan recalls a trip she took with Courtney to New Orleans, Louisiana and New York, New York.

I can say the best bittersweet experience is when we went to New Orleans one time. Before we arrived in New Orleans I let her stay with her grandmother a week before the trip and on the way to New Orleans, we picked her up. My daughter was allergic to peanuts and eggs when she was young. Her grandmother allowed her to eat eggs that whole entire week. You know how sometimes your own mother can be, we tell them our kids are allergic to something, or in-laws, and they say “no, they’re not.” You know, they just go ahead and give them whatever and so by the time I got my daughter, picked her up and kept on driving to New Orleans. By the time we got to New Orleans, my child was throwing up everywhere. There [were] 20 other girls with us, so I had to basically take care of my child that entire week, until we got back home. With that, I had taken her to the hospital because the throwing up wouldn’t stop. The hotel staff was nice because the hospital was right down the street from the hotel. They put her in a wheelchair and we were on the sidewalk in a wheelchair taking her to the hospital. The doctor did say that it was because she had eaten eggs. The trip was nice even though it was supposed be an exciting education experience. I was mom that weekend and no one else could touch her but mom even though there were other sorority sisters that I had that were willing to say “you go enjoy the conference and I’ll watch her.” I was like “No, she wanted mom”. That made me feel good, I didn’t feel like it was a waste of money and time because I was able to take care of my child no matter where we were.

And then there was the time we went to Philadelphia. We had a lot of fun because we were supposed to be in a conference and we decided to drive over to New York for just that morning. New York is a very exciting but busy place. My daughter, I want to say she was maybe just 8 or 9. We tried to get a taxi, there was four of us, and three of us were 18 and over. We were on the corner screaming “Taxi! Taxi!” and nobody was stopping. My daughter screams “Taxi!” and a taxi screeched to a stop and we still tell that story today, how we couldn’t get a cab, but she was able to get one [laughter].

As I continued to discuss the activities Megan shared with Courtney, Megan continued to emphasize the importance of exposing her children and giving them the life and educational experiences whether they were ready to receive the experience or not. In Megan's opinion you are able to learn through your experiences.

I had great family support. Megan credits the support of her family and ex-husband's family with helping raise her children. She reflects that traveling with her job was the main reason she was unable to provide support at times while Courtney was growing up.

By me traveling a lot, if she needed help with homework, either her father had to give it to her, or the nanny had to give it to her, or she had to get it at school. The majority of time she was finished with her homework before she left school.

So, I guess by me traveling I wasn't there to provide her with the help she needed at home.

Megan was quick to say that Courtney received her educational influence from both sides of the family. Megan claimed the topic of education was always discussed with both children.

There were several, let's start with family because [in] our family, we have individuals that have B.A.s [Bachelor of Arts degree], B.S.s [Bachelor of Science degree], Master's, all the way to Ph.D.s [Doctor of Philosophy] and all of us try to speak to our younger generations that's in our family. We try to let them know that to get an education is important, and so whatever assistance they needed, we were there for them. She has from aunts, to uncles, to cousins that are judges, we all are there and we try to give them that advice, that mentor that they need in order to keep going and not just stop at the high school level, but keep going up into college and get their degrees.

As for outside of the family, we have friends that surround [ed] our kids that are educated friends and they have their college degrees. They also stress the importance of receiving a college degree. By me putting her in my sorority youth group, showed her that education and college, is important and what you can do with it [education]. We have a variety of careers within the sorority and she can see that they're all positive people and they're living it. They all have nice things that you can have besides selling drugs on the street, you can work for it and establish it and get it honestly.

I inquired about how Courtney's father supported her. Megan said:

Her father, he's also an educated man. And on his side of the family, he has Ph.D.s. That's where the doctor is and also the judge. And so they stress, and even though she has grandparents, on her dad's side, they don't even have a high school degree, diploma, they stress to her, and all their kids graduated with a college degree. Education is very, very important on that side of the family, starting from the daddy all the way to the, his brothers and mom and dad.

The overall support came from both sides and definitely played a critical part in Courtney pursuing her college education.

She gets it from both sides, from all angles, from friends, relatives, church. She gets that positive thinking, and also mentor[ing] that she needs in order to go on and go to college. If she had decided to not go to college, everybody would have wondered why, because it was there for her and everybody stressed it. She has a mind of her own, but I'm so glad that her mind tells her "go to school." And she'll tell you, she said "I'm going to keep going until I'm through, because I'm not stopping, because what I see [with] Momma, is once you finish with school, you get up and go to work every single day. I'm not going to stop until I have everything."

In addition to family support, Megan spoke about other outside sources that helped her children with their academics.

Courtney had to take speech therapy because she stuttered when she was young. They said because she was thinking faster than she was speaking. Then my son, he had to take what they call Kumon [nationwide tutoring company], because we had him in the best education, but still there [were] things we just couldn't teach him or couldn't help him with. We had to get outside help, but now they're both doing very well, they always did well but it was something that was just lacking them to do better and we had to find out what it was, we made sure that they received the help.

The family support helped mold Courtney into the young lady she is today. Megan acknowledged that she is blessed that her family rallied around her children in such a positive way in terms of educational and life experiences.

Megan drew upon resources outside the home to support Courtney's educational experience. First, Megan wanted Courtney to receive the best education so she decided that Courtney should attend private school. Cooper (2005) stated that Black mothers who value education are often faced with the conversation of placing their children in public or private schools. Furthermore, Megan searched for a home in the neighborhood where the private school was located, which agrees with Holme (2002) on how parents buy homes in neighborhoods where the school are academically strong.

Second, Megan made the choice to hire a nanny to help support herself and her children while she worked outside the home. Megan's job required her to travel a great deal during the week and she needed someone to fulfill her motherly duties. Although she was quick to mention her bitterness of having to travel, her job gave her the financial security to have a nanny available to assist with her children. In addition, her ex-husband played an important role by remaining committed to actively participating in their

children's lives. Megan's family also provided support and mentorship for Courtney by emphasizing the importance of education as well.

Finally, Megan participated in activities outside the home to support Courtney's educational experience. For example, Megan took Courtney on trips within the United States in order for her to experience different places, people and environments. Megan believed the resources she provided were beneficial in supporting Courtney's educational experience.

Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success

I have a White name. Megan explains how she was named.

My mom named me after her nurse and her doctor's girlfriend because the doctor and one nurse said, "oh, well you have to give her my name." That's how I ended up with my name, my middle name and even my nickname.

In grade school Megan would realize that she was Black based on her name being White.

I realized that I was Black when I was growing up. The schools that I attended, the teachers were able to choose their students, and I really realized that I was Black when they called my name as Megan. When I walked in the classroom, not the first time, but the second and third time and noticed that I was the only Black kid in the classroom and I didn't understand why until I realized that it had to do with my name. I say that because the teachers were able to choose their students and they chose Megan and they didn't know that Megan was Black until I got in the classroom. And that's when it hit me is that why am I the only Black and it has to be because of my name, Megan.

Megan later revealed there could have been other factors, but the incident in school was when she realized she was Black and "different."

When I ask Megan about racial identity and racism, she spoke of her experience candidly, when she was offered a job after graduating from college.

After I graduated from college, and I received this job, I wasn't the only Black in the department but it was only two of us [Blacks] at the time and this lady [who was White] got to the point where she couldn't even work with Blacks, bottom line. So it was more like she was prejudiced towards Blacks and she really showed it. She didn't want to train me, she didn't want to have anything to do with me and not only that, when she did train me, she found faults in whatever I tried to do. Even the simplest things; if I asked her to repeat something, "Well you need to listen." That's when I really experienced it and the effect it had on me. How I handled it was, I eventually had to go and report what I was feeling and the way that I was being treated to my supervisor and he had to speak to that employee. And ever since then, I look at where I'm working, wherever I go, you don't have to like me, we don't have to be best friends, but we're both here to do a task or responsibility, we have to work in order to get that done, so just communicate with me long enough so we can get this job done and once we leave here, you go your separate way. So that's the attitude I take, I don't have to like an individual in the work place, but I'm going to do what I have to do to get my job done.

Megan discussed that this experience helped her in understanding how to deal with people that you work with. It also taught her the importance of staying focused on the task at hand and not letting people affect certain outcomes in her life.

You will finish school. Megan was raised by her mother. She explains, "My father died before I was born, and there are six of us in the family." Megan's mother worked at nights but expected the siblings to get up and go to school. Megan revealed that the importance of education hit home when her older sister became pregnant.

As for education with the girls, it really hit home when my oldest sibling, sister, when she got pregnant before she graduated from school and my mom told her,

“I don’t care what you do, or what happens, you’re going to march across that stage, you’re going to finish school.” And that’s when I realized that education was important to my mom, especially with the girls in our family. “You’re going to get an education regardless whether you’re pregnant or not.” So she did. She [my sister] walked across that stage pregnant. She said, “if we have to help you, whatever we have to do” and I was young at the time, but that’s when it hit home, that education was important.

The expectation of making sure Megan and her siblings attended school worked. Megan recalled that there were times when she was sleepy and did not feel like going to school, but she always got up and went.

Megan attended segregated schools and schools that had a majority population of Blacks.

They [elementary schools] were, majority Black and then primary school, 5th and 6th grades, they started trying to segregate the schools, so they started busing us out to the White areas. So that’s when I had to stop walking and then start getting on the bus going to other schools that were in the White area. Around the 8th and 9th grade, they decided “okay, no, we want you all to stay in your area, so we want you to start walking again.” And I had to start walking again.

She indicated that walking to school was not an easy task.

I tell my kids today that we had to walk to school, and it wasn’t just a mile. We went home this past Christmas [2010] and we showed my daughter how far we had to walk to school, and it was like maybe 3 to 4 miles going and then coming back, it was quite a distance.

Megan continued to be shuffled between schools in her area and this was frustrating for her. While in high school her mother wanted to move again, and Megan refused.

My mom moved us to another area and we had to ride the bus again, which was in a town with a military base, but no one actually stayed in these schools long

periods of time. You may have kids that stayed there a year and then their dads or mom had to move, but because we were actually living in that area, we were there until we graduated. I stayed there, and then they wanted to bus us again somewhere else, and I told my momma, I wasn't going to go to a different school. You're going to have to get me a car because I was not leaving this school. Because we had to go to so many different schools, I said this is it. So my mom got me a car, and I ended up graduating from that school.

Although Megan ended up graduating from that high school, she would never get to experience her senior year. She was forced to graduate high school early and attended a city college. She eventually became burned out on school and stopped attending, but after some time for reflection she went back to school and got her bachelor's degree.

I ended up graduating early because back then President Carter had said that anyone that was receiving social security, and I was, due to the fact that my father had passed away, had to be in college before 1982 ended. So they pulled me out of the 11th grade, and instead of me going to my high school 12th grade, I ended up having to go to college my 12th grade year. So I missed out on prom, running track, and playing in the band. I missed out on everything that a person would do in their 12th grade year at school being a senior. I had to go off to college and I did, but I went local, and by then I was burned out because going straight from high school, the 11th grade, going into college was hard. I was burned out so I decided to take a year off and I moved to Dallas to be with my sister. She told me "okay, that's enough; it's time for you to get back in school." So I got back into school by going to [an HBCU], graduated from the HBCU. Then I decided years later when my daughter was 13, that I wanted to get my Master's. But because I traveled a lot with my job, I knew that I couldn't go sit in a classroom. I needed something online and then that's when I enrolled and received my Master's in Accounting.

Megan further explained how she felt about missing her senior year of high school.

Megan recalled being angry because she did not understand why she had to leave school and felt that she was not ready to go to attend college.

I was hurt and unsettled about it because I couldn't believe it first of all and I couldn't understand why we had to leave. It was four of us in that whole school that had to leave and go off to college. I was mostly angry because I had to leave school, I enjoyed going [to college], but I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready to leave high school and step into college yet. And then leave my friends, so I was more disappointed than hurt about it.

Then Megan shared that her interests were more focused on being social than academics.

When I was in school, I didn't really have a favorite subject, I was just interested in being there and running track and playing sports and playing in the band, just getting up and going to school to be with the friends, not necessarily doing the work of school. There were certain subjects that I liked, typing class, home economics, but as for actually the subjects of getting an education, you know, studying? I really didn't have that interest growing up, I really didn't.

She was really there to be with friends and play sports, which is why she did not want to leave high school early. I ask Megan about her mother's education and she tells me that her mother started off her school years in a Catholic school and then went to an all-Black high school. Her mother was able to graduate from high school and then had Megan and her siblings. Megan's mother attempted to go back to college but never finished.

Being present in my daughter's life was important. Megan became a single mother when Courtney turned 13. Megan recalls:

My daughter was in the eighth grade. I think that's 13. At that time she did not want anyone in her school to know that we were getting divorced or even, [know] that I was a single mom. She knew that it was time for us to get a divorce, but she said, "I don't want my friends to know right now," because her friends, most of them had gone through it. That was her wish. And my son was 4 years old and in kindergarten, and that's what they asked us to do, so whenever

we were in school or out of school or in their activities, whatever we attended, It's not like we were hugged all up under each other, but we sat and we acted like we supported them, civilized people just there to support their kids.

Megan said the divorce did affect Courtney, but Megan's out of town work schedule affected her more. Megan remembers,

I did a difference in her grades where her grades did go down and her attitude changed, but then she realized that I was there and I was still supporting her.

I think us getting a divorce wasn't as devastating as much as me being out of town as much. I was out of town a lot because of my job and so the kids they had their dad and also a nanny.

What affected her most is that she was not there for Courtney when she started menstruating. I am able to recognize the hurt and remorse in Megan voice as she recalls that day.

I think what really, really got her and me both, while she was growing up is when I was out of town and she had her first menstruation. Yeah, that still hurts me today. I had been at work, and got back to the hotel, I got a phone call, and she said "mom, I started my period today." I said, who, what happened, who took, what, what? She said, "well." I said did you go to her? Did you go to her and let her know what was happening? There was a Black administrative assistant at her school that kind of like helped me out with, especially Courtney and my son. She said "no." And I said well, what did you do? She told me that she just went to the rest room and stuffed herself with tissue, and so, immediately, I apologized because I felt like I needed to, I felt like I should have been there. I should have been there but I wasn't and I think that affected and hurt me, and her, because her mom wasn't there. But once she called me, I called my sister and even though she was with her dad, I called my sister and I told my sister what happened and my sister went and took care of her until I got back home. Then I called the assistant at the school and let her know it happened and then she took care of her during school until I got back.

After Megan shared this story, I asked her if she has joint or sole custody of her children. She replies, "I'm the primary care giver, I have sole custody of them. He does have visitation rights, but I have sole custody of the kids." I then asked Megan if the father had taken an active role in the children's lives and she responded:

Their dad still is very active. By me not being raised with a dad, I felt that even though I got a divorce it was very important that my kids have their relationship with their dad, so I do not take any of what I have been through with him out on them by not allowing them to have their relationship with their dad. He is very active, he's still active, anything they need, want, he's just a phone call away.

This concluded our first interview, but when I turned off the recorder she began to talk about her relationship with her ex-husband and her battle with cancer. I asked her if I could record her and she said yes. She said, "It was very stressful. They say cancer is in everyone, it's what you do to bring it out." From this statement I gather she means stress played a critical part in making her sick. She explains she was very hesitant to tell her ex-husband about her cancer, but there came a time when she had to tell him. She explained, "I did not want to tell him because if you left me when I was strong; don't come back when I am weak." She eventually asked her ex-husband to help, he was shocked to learn Megan had cancer, but he did step in to help out with their children.

I'm a survivor. In 2006, Megan found out that she had breast cancer. It was a very stressful time for her; she was working full-time, working on her master's degree and in the process of divorcing her husband. She discussed that time in her life:

I don't know if [it was] the stress of the divorce or stress of just working, because I traveled a lot or just a combination of it all. I was also going back to school to get my Master's and had two classes left and I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Going through cancer I decided to not hinder myself or handicap myself with the illness. I kept working up until I had to go to radiation every day. I kept traveling up until I had to go to radiation, chemo and surgery. After I would do a surgery, I would just get back on my feet and go back to work.

At that time my husband wasn't with me. We had been separated so I had to ask my mom and older sibling to come down and help me with the kids and with my surgeries. I wanted to [tell my husband], but I didn't tell anyone at that time because I didn't want the sympathy or someone to bring me down with their pity. I wanted to be strong, not just for me, but for my kids. I didn't want them to think that momma was leaving them so, I pretended like it [the cancer] wasn't even there. It was just a hump in the road is what I said and I'm just waiting to cross over it.

Once I got over it, it was a great success. During that time it was very hard and difficult. I had two classes left with my Master's program and I had to contact the professors and let them know what I was going through. They worked with me on turning in my papers and doing my tests online. I completed my Master's degree and I decided that because of what I was going through, I wanted to actually go to Phoenix and graduate in Phoenix instead of some of the local colleges that you can do. It was a great accomplishment for me because of what I was going through and at the same time raising two kids.

I learned that you don't let anything get in your way, not even illness. It depends on how strong you are, but that's within to me. You can be as strong as you want to be as long as you keep a positive mind and that's what I had to do.

I inquired on how her children took the news. She replied, "They were sad at first, when you hear cancer, especially at a young age, they felt momma was going to die. She revealed:

I had to assure them that I wasn't going anywhere and that's how I ended up doing it. I just to keep moving and kept going. I didn't want them to see me in bed all the time, even though I did have some situations where I had to lay down and go to bed. I can only recall maybe four times that they actually saw me that way [very weak], and the majority of times, it was after surgery. Going through chemo and radiation, my daughter did get a big shock, because I took her with me when I was going through chemo and radiation. I think my daughter, she really got scared when they had to put the needle in me to insert the medicine and they couldn't put it in, and the needle was like the size of a nail. They couldn't find a vein and they had to stick me again and she actually screamed. I asked her to leave until they got the needle in and then come back. . I wanted them [my children] to see what I had to go through. I didn't hide from them. I let them [her children] know and I let them see that an individual can go through an illness, and overcome it. You have to be strong about it, and if nothing else, if she would just say to herself "my mom was strong through the whole entire time that she went through cancer," that's what I think she took from it.

She reached for her purse and pulled out her wallet. She shows me her driver's license picture and says, "This is a picture of me when I was able to get a relaxer on my hair after going through chemo." It's a reminder of how far I've come."

She wanted to be around other Blacks. I asked Megan about discussing race and racial identity with Courtney. She responded, "She never did look at herself as being a different color. She looked at herself as just having a friend that didn't look like her. "

Megan explained that since she spent her elementary and middle school years in a Catholic school, her classmates did not change often.

This was really weird because she went to a Catholic school. She was mainly the only one [Black] in her classes. The same class, except for maybe one or two students would come in new, so the class she started with, she basically graduated with that class. It started off being two Blacks in the class and then, it still ended up being two Blacks in the class at the end when she graduated. She

didn't understand, Black or, to me when I felt like she noticed that she was Black is when I put her in a Black Catholic church.

Megan's strategy for helping Courtney with her racial identity was to immerse Courtney in White and Black environments.

So when she went to school, even though she was around a majority of Whites, her church environment, her community environment was [a] Black environment. I kept her in the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority to let her know, you are a different color and there are different cultures and we do different things than the Whites. I think she realized that, maybe in the 4th or 5th grade because that's when, it was 6th because she had first communion, that's what it's called, when she took her first communion, I had her do it in both places to let her know, yes, you do it here at school, but then I want to take you and let you experience how the Black culture does first communion. That's when she realized I think that she was different, because the whole entire time, she was in a class by herself and that's what made her want to go to other schools, two blacks in a class by themselves. That's why she wanted to go to a historical black college too. She said, "I want to be around my own people." She will tell you. I asked her, because when we started selecting colleges, I asked her, well, what college do you want to attend? She was getting invitations from Nebraska, Ohio, and places like that. The brochures just showed one Black and the rest White? And she said, "No, I want to attend a historical Black college."

I asked Megan if Courtney is happy she chose to attend a historically Black university.

Oh my goodness yes, she loves it, she loves being around her own kind. What really got her was when we went to Atlanta, Georgia to visit Spelman University and Clark University. We had some friends that took us out to dinner and everything. When you walk into a restaurant, it's all Black, okay, we're not talking about Popeye's, we're talking about an upscale restaurant that we walked into and it was majority Black and there may have been a hand full of Whites, they were the minority. I asked her in the restaurant that night, is this something that you can get used to, because our town is totally different. We walk into a restaurant and we are the minority [in our town]. She said, "I love it, I love this

momma.” That’s why she chose to attend a Black university. I think right now she’s in hog heaven, that’s what I call it because I’m from Arkansas [laughter].

Megan is glad she exposed Courtney to both the Black and White environments. In the end, Courtney gravitated to the environment with which she was comfortable. The evidence is rooted in the academic success Courtney has had in college.

I’m still striving for more. When I asked Megan about being successful, she stated she is still striving for more in her personal and professional life. She even joked, “I am going to get myself back on the market for dating pretty soon.” I’m impressed that Megan was focused on attaining more goals after all she has been through.

I consider myself a successful person, but I’m not content and so therefore I’m still striving for more. Let’s just say that I have accomplished the goals that I set back then and now I have other goals that I feel will make me even more successful in life. For my career goals, I still have goals set for that where I want to be, a director of a department instead of just where I’m sitting at today. And then as for, you know I have personal goals I want to do with myself after my kids, after my son graduates. I feel that would help my career as well.

I asked Megan to define her success rate. She scored herself on a scale of ten.

Well for my age and for being a Black woman, I feel I’m probably 8 out of 10 in success wise. I have accomplished a lot, I mean, to me, being a Black woman and with a Master’s degree, where I’m sitting at today [career wise], I think I’m happy, but like I said, not content, so I look at it like an 8 on a 10 scale.

As for Courtney’s success, Megan felt she had contributed both educationally and personally. Megan credited her own education as a tool that has allowed her to participate and influence her daughter’s success.

Well I can say I have because when it comes down to completing applications whether it's for scholarships or whether it's for jobs, she had a part time job, which she's still holding on to, they allow her to work when she comes home. Educational wise, yes, I feel like I did and it's because I had the knowledge of what to put on those documents [applications and scholarships] or who to contact in order to make sure she's completed them correctly, or getting in the door. You know, like for instance like college, I knew some people at the college that she decided to go to and I gave them a phone call said, hey, I'm on my way, I'm bringing my daughter with me, and this is what I need you to do for me. So yeah, I feel like my success, where I've been and the position that I'm in today has had a great impact on what she's trying to accomplish.

As I continued to talk with Megan, she was glad that her educational experiences allowed her to be supportive of her daughter. Megan was humbled by the fact that she has accomplished several things, but still has the desire to do and be more for herself and her children.

I should have kept her in private school. When I inquired about the one thing that Megan could change about her participation in Courtney's educational experience, she adamantly replied,

I would have kept her in private school through high school.

I would have changed the fact of sending her to public school. I would have kept her in private school all the way through 12th grade. I just felt like she wasn't prepared. She wasn't ready to switch from a private school. I feel like, because she was in private school for so long, no one there, actually, tried to take advantage of her. As for bullying or trying to fit in, they were taught that you love and like everyone.

Going to a public school was so different because she had to adapt to, not so much of bullying but cliques that were already established. She had to gain friends, and then also learning the public system. I can't say that the private

school was strict, but they weren't as relaxed as a public school. A public school is more relaxed with grades, the parent went to talk to the teacher and let the teacher know that "look, I, my kid's grades are important, and it's important that she maintains As and Bs. To me it was more of a relaxed environment, "well whatever your child shows me I'll help and if not then I'm just going to let that child just slide through or flunk." So I had to give her attention. The teachers had to provide the attention that we were looking for out of a teacher. So we kind of challenged the teacher, to step up to the plate, you need to teach our kids, I didn't feel like I should have had to challenge the teacher. I feel like it should have been more like the private school where they have the concern for the time your child walked into the classroom until they left. I just felt like the public school we had to constantly stay on the teachers to teach our child and make sure she was maintaining what we considered our standard, which was As and Bs.

Upon reflection, Megan felt that private school would have better prepared Courtney for college and other life experiences. She admitted Courtney had to adjust, but felt private school was the best option. Megan accepted full responsibility for allowing Courtney to attend public school because she wanted Courtney to be happy. Megan was grateful she had her own school experiences and the experience of Courtney attending private school to uphold her expectations academic success.

My dream is her dream. Megan revealed that she wants to see her daughter graduate from college and own her own architecture firm one day. She was very proud of her accomplishments thus far.

My ideal dream is for her to graduate. I didn't care what degree. My dream is to see her march across the stage and receive her degree. My dream is, which is her dream is for her to complete, and then own her own architecture firm. I just want to someday see those things come true.

Megan's expectations were for Courtney to obtain good grades and stay out of trouble.

I want for her to make good grades. Maintain and stay on the honor roll, but still have that outside activity to keep a balance. A steady balance that involves schoolwork but also doing things within the school that can be fun. That was just my expectation for her to make good grades and not get in trouble.

In addition, Megan felt that Courtney's current educational status met her dreams and aspirations at this time. She beamed when she shared how proud she was of Courtney. She was especially proud of her current grade point average of 3.5.

It's on track. She is in college. She has a 3.5 overall average and I think she's moving exactly the way she planned and the way I planned as well. Her dad is proud as well. We [Megan and ex-husband] tell her all the time that we are so proud of what she has accomplished so far and we try to instill in her positive praise and let her know to just keep going, keep doing what you're doing we're proud of you and happy and we're there for you.

Megan said that she was very grateful that Courtney's college experience was going so well. She appreciated that she and her ex-husband had provided a co-parenting balance for Courtney to be successful in her endeavors.

Stay positive. Megan's message to other single mothers was to remain positive and support their children in their educational and life experiences. She emphasizes that mothers do not need a degree to have successful children. It helps, but is not necessary.

It doesn't matter if you have a college degree or not. Your kids don't have to fall back into your footsteps or where you have walked. As long as you are carrying a positive attitude and you are letting your children know they can be and do whatever they set their minds to do, then you don't have to have a college degree. It would be wise to set an example so you can say, look what I have. Look what I have done. So when you do speak, you can say I have been down that road before. If you don't have it [the experience], then provide them with

that support. That's something that they're going to need in order to obtain what you couldn't. Whether it was because you couldn't afford it or your mind just wasn't set to go to college. Provide them with the support and positive thinking. There's lots of resources out there if you don't have the money to send your child to school. Go on the web. There's lots of scholarships, as well as foundations and organizations that are willing to help you get your child through college. Don't give up on them even if they fall short or they kind of slip off that positive road. Put them back on it. Sometimes we want to be friends before we are parents. I think we need to always maintain a parent relationship with our children and let them establish their own friends. We can have fun with our kids and still be a parent.

Megan addressed cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with Courtney through dialogue and participation. First, Megan immersed Courtney into both White and Black environments to help with racial identity. For example, while attending private school Courtney was in a predominately White environment, but her community and home life consisted of a Black environment. Although Megan chose the private school for academic success, she was still able to nurture Courtney's cultural identity.

Second, Megan demonstrated to Courtney the power of endurance as she battled breast cancer. Megan allowed Courtney to attend appointments with her for radiation and chemotherapy. Megan did this because she felt it was important for Courtney to understand that her daughter must fight and never give up on self, even in sickness. Megan was able to exhibit the meaning of a survivor.

Finally, Megan empowered Courtney through constant support. Since Megan had a college experience, she advised and guided Courtney through the college process. For instance, she took Courtney on college visits and allowed her to experience the campus

culture while gathering application information about the various colleges. Megan believes it was Courtney's strong connection with the Black community that gave Courtney the desire to attend an HBCU. She also illustrated to Courtney the importance respecting and loving self. Megan did this by ending her marriage and instilling in Courtney that she should not allow anyone to intentionally disrespect or hurt you. All these educational and life experiences permitted Megan to nurture Courtney in terms of her cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment.

Megan's portrait highlighted the importance of persistence and determination. In spite of her divorce and cancer, Megan was still able to influence her daughter's educational experience in a positive and successful manner. Megan's portrait revealed that although divorced, she and her ex-husband were able to put the past behind them and co-parent their children and keep the focus on the well-being of the children. Megan was also able to nurture and support Courtney's relationship with her father because she realized that it was in the best interest of Courtney and her progress during her childhood. Megan also used her own educational experiences as a tool in making decisions for Courtney's educational experience.

By exploring Megan's life experience as a married, then divorced, mother and the challenges she has faced, we can understand the power of maintaining focus and resilience as a parent no matter how hard life gets. Ultimately, it was Megan's inner strength and hardships that allowed her to be a survivor and show her children what a survivor looks like, which made a difference in Courtney's educational experience.

Chapter Seven: A Portrait of Pamela (High school dropout)

“It was like a ray of sunshine.”

Pamela is the mother to one of my friends, Jasmine. Jasmine’s niece and my daughter have played volleyball together for four years. When I launched the search for my dissertation study, Jasmine said she would ask Pamela, her mother to participate. When I first met Pamela, I introduced myself and told her about my research project. She and I agreed to interview the weekend of her birthday celebration.

In order for me to feel more comfortable and to build a level of trust with Pamela, I attended her birthday celebration and was able to meet her family members. She introduced me to her mother during my visit. Pamela was given a car as her birthday present and could not stop smiling about it. I could tell she comes from a family that loves to have fun. Everyone in her family was very warm and friendly. After mingling for the night we agreed to interview the following day.

Pamela is 55 years old, stands about five foot three inches and has long Black wavy hair with an olive complexion. She is from Denver, Colorado, but moved to Texas during middle school. Pamela did not graduate from high school, she dropped out in the tenth grade. She explains, “I went through 10th grade just being disobedient and disrespectful, a loose cannon, I didn’t have the backing of an adult.” She reveals that she did try to instill education in her children. Pamela has four children and her oldest, Jasmine, is the only child with a college degree. She discloses, “Jasmine is a ray of sunshine.” Jasmine received her bachelor’s degree in Business Administration in

Accounting from a private university in 1995. In addition, Pamela raised one of her brother's children and three of her sister's children.

In this portrait I examine how a mother who did not finish high school influenced her daughter's educational experience, which resulted in the daughter attaining a college degree. In addition the researcher is able to identify the parental involvement of the Pamela and explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions as she raised her daughter. First, the portrait will highlight how Pamela communicated and interacted with Jasmine (her daughter) about education from early childhood through high school. Second, the portrait will investigate if Pamela used any resources from outside the home regarding Jasmine's educational experiences. Finally, the portrait will illustrate how Pamela addressed the concerns of racial identity, endurance and empowerment within herself and with Jasmine in the context of educational success.

Communicating and Interacting with Jasmine

Mothers teach respect and appreciation. As I sat down to interview Pamela, I asked her what her philosophy on motherhood was. She revealed that she wanted to teach her children respect, appreciation, and to get an education. She explains, "I wanted to be the best mother, to teach respect to [my] children, teach appreciation, mainly respect and appreciation. And the education that I didn't get." I noticed the emphasis Pamela placed on the word education and asked her about her education. She reveals that she was very disobedient and did not take education seriously as a child and she did not want that for her children.

Pamela feels that she was a very effective mother with her children. Pamela believed in being straightforward. She states, “I taught my children right from wrong and the consequences from the beginning. No mixed messages.” She also believes she was effective because all of her children are grown and living their lives in a positive manner.

Pamela’s main goal was for her children to get a better education than she received.

First of all, my main goal was to get them a better education than I had. It wasn’t that I couldn’t get a better education I just didn’t, being hard headed and not having a parent pushing me. So that was my number one goal to make sure they got an education, at least high school and college if possible. My main thing was to get out of high school, which I didn’t do.

I sense the urgency and passion in Pamela’s voice as she shares the importance of her children going further in their educational experiences that she did. She finds comfort in knowing that as a mother respect and appreciation for self, others and education was a must for her children.

I was rebellious. As the interview transitions to Pamela’s educational history, I question her about her own memories from elementary and middle school. She reveals that she was very rebellious and started trouble for no reason.

Elementary was all Black, very strict teachers. Junior high, integrated and that’s when I was very rebellious and I’m still rebellious today. I’m working hard on myself not to be, but I’ve always been a rebellious person since school integrated in junior high. I mean sometime I’d pick a fight with some White girl just because, just because she was White, you know, wasn’t no particular reason. If she looked at me like, if I thought she was looking at me, like something, that

was just the thing to do that I thought was the thing to do. The one year that I did make it in high school, it was segregated.

When the topic of high school is discussed, Pamela recalls the time she got kicked out of high school.

I was in 10th grade and got kicked out for being disobedient. One of the teachers raised her fist at me. She was a White woman and just me being me, I just picked up my foot and kicked her. I felt like I had to protect myself, I got kicked out of school. They said I couldn't go anywhere in the area where I was going to school and I never furthered my education.

Once again after reflection, Pamela states that she is a different person and has grown through those situations.

I see some of them now and a couple of girls are like "I remember you, you were the one that did this and did that." I'm like, yeah, but, you know that was back then. I've never really formally apologized but I'm like, I'm not the same person anymore, I've grown up, I've matured. I guess my roughness was really because I didn't have any parent to force me to get an education or tell me how important an education was. I did what I wanted to do on my own when it came to education.

The good news is that with age and wisdom Pamela has been able to see that some of her rebellious decisions were not the best decisions to make. However, she was still able to reflect on her mistakes and wanted better for her children's education.

It was like a ray of sunshine. When it was time for Jasmine to start kindergarten Pamela expresses, "I was very excited." Pamela understood that Jasmine had to go to school and she had to go to work. In the back of Pamela's mind she knew her parents hadn't pushed her, but she was determined to push Jasmine. Ironically, Jasmine was

eager to go as well.

She was very at ease with other children. I mean it was nothing like what I went through. I knew she had to go to school. I knew I had to leave her because I had to work. She never said, "I don't want to go." Sometimes she didn't want to wear what I had her wear or to wear her hair like I wanted to. Our problem was me doing her hair and her being [a] Black child I would put her hair in Afro puffs. She thought since she had long hair and she was pretty much one of the only ones in the school with Afro puffs or something like that and she didn't want that. She'd cry but we kind of worked that out. As far as her just going to school, I never had a problem with sending her off and she never had a problem just staying there.

Pamela's face lights up when I ask her about when Jasmine went off to college.

Well she was still at home and college was just a couple of blocks up the street. It was like a ray of sunshine being a single parent most of my life and knowing that she wanted more for herself being the oldest child and wanting more. You know, she set an example, not just for herself, but her sister and brothers to let them know that education was important. I think with her being the oldest, I got through to her pretty easy to get an education and this is what you have to do. I would tell her, you know these people out here that you clown around with, they got an education you know, and you don't want to be left behind. As far as her going to college, like I said, it was just up the street, it wasn't a problem.

Pamela was and is very proud of Jasmine because Jasmine was an example of how important education is by attending college.

Oh man, proud, I guess you could say proud was the word. I don't know what other word I could use but like I say, it was just like a ray of sunshine. I told everybody, my daughter goes to State University, you know, she's this, this, and this. She used to tell me, "Momma, you brag too much, you ain't supposed to brag." Well, as a single parent I felt like with my education or lack thereof, I had the right to brag. I know that as far as their values, education and appreciation, stuff like that, I felt that I did a great job on all of them as far as that goes.

The entire time Pamela is talking about Jasmine and her accomplishment of attending and graduating from college, I can feel a sense of pride in Pamela's voice. I gather by her facial expressions, she expected Jasmine to graduate from high school, but to graduate from college was beyond her dreams.

Pamela was very raw in her approach as she communicated and interacted with Jasmine. Pamela is very honest about her lack of education and her rebellion. However, there was a spirit inside her that wanted more for Jasmine. Black parents want their children to surpass them socioeconomically (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982). Pamela felt education was the for better life opportunities for Jasmine. As a mother she taught Jasmine to be respectful and to get an education. Since Pamela dropped out of high school in tenth grade, she was aware of how her rebellion limited her life in certain ways. Pamela pushed Jasmine to get an education because no one pushed her. Pamela believes that by constantly verbalizing the importance of education to Jasmine, she was able to play a critical role in Jasmine finishing high school and graduating with a college degree.

Resources Outside the Home that Supported Educational Experiences

School choice. Pamela sent her children to the schools that were located in their neighborhoods and there was no decision-making involved. She asserts they were pretty good schools. However she did admit there were times when she used a different address for her children.

I didn't make the decision. Whatever area you lived in, that's the school you went to. If you lived in that neighborhood where that school was, that's where you went. A few times I did use someone else's address to get her [Jasmine] out of [school]. If any one of them was in a troubled school, I would use my mother's address or something else, but most of the time they were in pretty good areas.

Although Pamela didn't make the decision on which schools Jasmine and her siblings would attend, she is thankful they lived in neighborhoods that had good schools. I change the subject by asking why the topic of education was important between her and Jasmine and she simply replies, "Because of my lack of education." We sat there in silence and that is all that needs to be said on the topic. Then, I ask Pamela when she began to talk with Jasmine about going to college, she laughs and says, Kindergarten.

I wanted her to finish high school and that was the main thing. If you could get to college, I'd like for you to get to college. She went to college, I still brag on her right today about going to State University.

As Pamela sat on the couch with her face beaming you can tell she is still proud and excited Jasmine went beyond high school to college. I begin to feel that ray of sunshine she feels when she speaks about Jasmine's choice to further her education in college.

We grew up together. As Pamela reflects on working outside the home, she admits that it was hard for Jasmine. She explains, "I think it was kind of rough on her, being the oldest, having to babysit a lot, but she knew I was working most of the time."

Pamela discloses she had to work in order to make sure her kids were cared for.

Sometimes I'd work three jobs, two full-time, one part-time, she [Jasmine] had to be the mother when I wasn't there. Sometimes, with me being young, she would

babysit while I was just out being a young woman in the street. Being young at that time, you know I really didn't think about it, but I know it was rough on her being the oldest and that made her even more want to do better than what she saw I had.

Pamela discloses that since she was a young mother, she learned with her children.

Inside the home, she really did not have the time to participate in activities because she was always working, but she constantly told her children to get an education.

We didn't do a lot of activities inside the home we really kind of grew up together. Jasmine was always a reader. I used to be a reader. I don't know, being a young mother of four at the age of 21, I didn't have time to read. I had to work. Jasmine's always been known as a bookworm. Like I said, I used to be that way, but I think by the time I had my second child, it kind of went out the window. We didn't have a bunch of discussion as far as homework. My main thing just get an education, do what you're supposed to do at school, but as far as, you know, I would have done things different looking back on life, okay, you can go get a book, okay you can teach them their colors or their numbers, I mean, it's not like I didn't try, but we didn't do a whole lot of that.

Since Pamela and her children grew up together per se, she did the best she could to balance work and spending time with her children. I asked Pamela if her family was able to take trips while her children were younger. She responds:

Oh we took trips, but not trips out of town. When I got paid, the kids would think and say, "Mommy got this, Mommy got that." But I would say, no, I'm going to show what I got, here's my check, you go and pay the bills, and when we get through paying bills, you tell me how much money is left, stuff like that. I mean that was education to them on how life is, okay this is what we got, let's go pay the bills and see what we got left. Because I work all the time, I'm suppose to have a lot of money but everybody knows how money is. I did, when I was working different jobs, my part time job was just for, to go out and do little game rooms or to the zoo or whatever we could do.

There were times when participating in activities suffered, because Pamela had to earn a living in order to support her children. Pamela admits she raised her children with minimal help from others.

Occasionally my mother and stepdad would, but no, I would not let them go off with anyone else. We pretty much did everything. Like I said, we grew up together. We did everything together.

On the contrary, Jasmine stayed with her grandmother [Pamela's mother] for a while to help her out because of her limited education.

Jasmine lived with my mother for a while. As far as raising my children I did that myself. Jasmine mainly lived with my mother because my mother's lack of education. When she [Jasmine] got to a point where she could read and write and help my mother out she moved in. It wasn't like I couldn't take care of her. It was that my mom needed help, and Jasmine was able to help her.

Pamela says she is grateful her children understood that she was doing the best she could with the circumstances in their lives. She really relied on Jasmine to help her out since she was the oldest and Jasmine would always rise to the occasion.

Pamela did not draw upon many outside sources to support Jasmine's educational experience. The only resource Pamela mentions was the family members that allowed her to use their address to for school enrollment. As I Pamela reveals earlier, she grew up with her children and relied on them as much as the relied on her. She asserts that her lack of education hindered her from being able to seek outside help with her children. In addition, she was firm in her belief that she was the only person that should raise her children and make all the decisions regarding their lives. As Pamela

admits early on that she has a level of distrust with others, therefore she was not open to resources outside the home other than family.

Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Success

Integration was hard for me. Pamela discloses that she always knew what ethnicity she was. She explains, “ I was raised around all Blacks and was aware of the fact that I was Black. I guess I realized at an age to realize you know, what nationality you are. I can’t tell you what age.” One thing Pamela was sure about in her childhood and adolescent years was the fact that she did not like being around non-Black ethnicities.

I went to an all Black school up until junior high and when we moved from Colorado to Texas. It was hard for me to accept integration. But I came around; it was just very difficult for me to accept other nationalities in the same room I was in.

I probe by asking why it was hard for her to accept other nationalities.

Because it was something different. I was surrounded by nothing but Black people since grade school. I knew what the Black Panthers were and I ran with them, so we didn’t do other nationalities as a whole. Because I’m thinking, this is a battle between the Black and the White and I kept that going for a long time.

When Pamela mentions the Black Panthers, I immediately become intrigued.

Being a Black woman, there is history in most Black communities that have been linked with the Black Panther organization. I inquire about what it was like to be involved with the Blank Panthers.

To me, at a young age, like I said, I didn’t have anybody in back of me telling me not to do certain things. I thought it was fun. It was dangerous, exciting. I didn’t

that realize at the time. Just, I thought it was the thing to do. We had meetings, and our meetings were to tell us what to do in the evening time after dark where we lived. The people that owned the stores, lived in the back of the stores, so our thing was to break in the stores, ransack the stores and try to get out quick as you can.

As we talk a little more about the Black Panthers, Pamela admits that since she did not have parent to actively participate in her childhood and adolescence, she did whatever she wanted to do. As we discuss racial identity, Pamela mentions that because of her appearance a lot of people thought she was Latina, but she always knew she was Black.

When I was in junior high, I hung around a lot of Mexican Americans and I had long hair and I had a lot of problems with the Black women, putting gum in my hair, you know stuff like that. I never really fought with them, but I just had a lot of name-calling and that went both ways, cause it was the White people that would say their thing and the Black people who didn't know me, they say different things. None of them really affected me, name calling affected me in life, it was just me growing up like I did affected me and makes me still have that little leery feeling about people in general.

Even though other Black and White students were not sure of Pamela's racial identity, Pamela was and her life experiences around the Black people in her life allowed her to be secure with herself and racial identity of being Black.

My own prejudice held me back. Pamela is open and honest when she admits that she was prejudiced at a younger age, but didn't realize it was racism. When I ask Pamela how racism affected her, she replies,

I think it kind of held me back in life.

I don't know, I guess I did grow up being prejudiced at a young age, which I didn't realize was being prejudiced, I knew I was a Black woman and we didn't

do the White thing. It hindered me in life and I realized that as an adult. As an adult, I kind of regret some of the things that I have done in life. I know it did hold me back from a lot of things that I feel very capable of, but not knowing that at the time, I just went with the flow.

As Pamela mentions regret, I ask her what sort of things she regrets in terms of her experiences with prejudice and racism.

I regret not being able to have friends of different nationalities. Right today I have very few friends that I can count on one hand, probably three fingers. Not that, I'm not prejudiced now, I just don't make friends that easy, I'm very stand offish, I 'm very, what do you call it? Not skeptical, what do you call that? Yeah I am reserved, but I'm very, untrusting, untrusting of them [Whites], I don't know, it's like, I still think they still have an agenda, (laughter) an agenda in the world and being Black and being of a middle lower class that I feel like it's a lot of people still in the world who don't feel like we're [Blacks] equal to them and me personally, I think I'm equal to everybody.

Although Pamela had issues with other ethnicities in her younger years, she insists she has grown to accept other non-Black ethnicities. She expresses that she is a constant work in progress of trusting and accepting others that are different from her.

I had no parental involvement. Pamela discloses that she did not have parental involvement in her educational experience and was not taught the importance of education from her parents. She expresses she has no memory of her parents talking about education with her.

It's just that I don't have any memory of them getting me dressed and out the door, but as far as getting to school, if I got there fine, if I didn't fine. My mother and father divorced when I was young. I lived with my father and grandmother. My father was in the service, my grandmother worked full time, so even in grade school, if I though I didn't want to go to school today, I just didn't go. I'm really

surprised that I made it to high school because even when I was in high school, I may have went one day a week, in junior high if I felt like going I did, if I once I left the house, whichever direction I went in that's where I went.

Next, I ask Pamela if she is aware of the types of school her parents attended.

Since her father was in the military Pamela is under the assumption he finished high school in an all Black area. In terms of her mother, Pamela reveals that her mother didn't even finish the fifth grade.

My dad, I know he finished school, I'm sure it was all Black [schools] at his age, his time. He was in the Army, my mother I know she didn't even finish elementary and you know I'm sure that's why she didn't force me to go. She quit school, I think she said that she didn't even get to the to the fifth grade, but she had to work being the oldest. I know it wasn't that she didn't care. She didn't have the education to know that as a parent she should have forced me to get what she didn't get. Even through my school years, she was still struggling and trying to make it as a single mother. Raising her kids and she never put education as a value.

I then ask Pamela about her father's role in her life as far as education was concerned.

She reveals her did not discuss education with her either.

He was with the military. I really didn't have anyone to tell me about education, about how important it was. I look at some of my cousins, just a few years under me and I sometimes envy them and their education, but at this time in my life, you know, I just look at well, I know it's not too late for an education, it's never too late, my daughter's tell me all the time. But in my mind it's too late; I'm doing this; I'm doing that. The Lord has given me the ability to get by in life, to take care of my children and do a lot of things, so, my mind, I keep wanting to go and get at least my GED [general education development] and I've never really thought about college, but I thought well if I get my GED, maybe my kids can be proud of their mother. At least get a GED, cause I was very, very strong on them getting their education.

As Pamela reflects on her school experience with her parents on the topic of education, she is grateful that she had the intuition to want more for her kids including getting a better education than she did.

Because I didn't get an education I pushed them towards an education and Jasmine has always been very bright, she wanted that education. I mean since kindergarten I always told them, you will finish high school, if I have to go with you every day. I think I told all of them every year. Jasmine wasn't, well any of my kids were never rebellious against going to school, because I was very, very firm about school. After you [her children] get out of school, if you want to be a clown, be a clown, but when you go to school, I do not play. I wanted them to get an education and to have a better life that I was not able to give them.

Even though Pamela's parents did not take an active role in her educational experience, Pamela was able to set different expectations for her own children. She was able to understand that education would provide an opportunity for Jasmine and her siblings to have a better life than she experienced because of her lack of education.

A drop of Black blood makes you Black. When I first met Jasmine, I thought she was Latina. She has an olive skin tone and long straight black hair. As a Black women, Jasmine did not have any physical traits Black communities use to identify if you are Black or not. In addition, Jasmine's sister has a caramel skin tone and kinky hair. As we became friends, I asked Jasmine's sister one day if she and Jasmine were partners. She [Jasmine's sister] bursts out with laughter and says, " We came from the same mother and we are sisters! " We bring Jasmine in on the conversation and Jasmine looks at me and says, "Yes, I'm Black."

Pamela disclosed that she and Jasmine did not sit down and have a talk about racial identity.

We never sat down and had a racial talk, you know, just like when you're around Blacks, you know you're Black. Jasmine's dad is Puerto Rican and society says if you got a drop of Black blood in you, you're Black. I know other people had problems with her, with her skin color, with her hair texture, you know, saying she's not Black, but she's Black, she's a Black woman. I remember one time at State University she came home and said that one of the professors wanted some of his students to write a paper about their background and stuff. He [professor] wanted to hear somebody from the ghetto. Me being who I am, the mother that I am, I'm like, Jasmine, I will take the ghetto to him. But she didn't want me to do that, so I was kind of restricted from the college campus (laughter).

Pamela continued her discussion with me and was sure that there were times when Jasmine may have cried and been confronted with racial issues. In those times, Pamela encouraged Jasmine to be strong.

Jasmine has always been a kind of a timid child through school and I guess a lot of it was racial. Well you can't go through life on what other people say. You know who you are. You know to stand strong in who you are. You know, you're Black whether your hair is long or you're light skinned, you don't pretend to be what they think you are. You're who you are and that can't be changed. I know she had probably cried a little bit, she had a few tears here and there. I think we all have when it comes to racism, but I'm a strong believer in standing strong, you know, you don't have to pretend just because society don't accept you.

I was inspired by the fact that Pamela is so proud to be a Black woman. Her spirit definitely uplifted me. After discussing racial issues, I ask Pamela about the involvement of Jasmine's father, she recounts her experience with Jasmine's father and his family.

I think he saw her once. He was a military guy and I think his family at one time wanted to have contact with Jasmine. Because I was young, I believed they actually wanted to take her away from me. Since I was young and was kind of

like a loose cannon, no one was gonna take anything from me, especially my child. So they really didn't have any other contact with me other than through mail once in a while. Every year I would send them a school picture, I never got any response back after the first confrontation. Our first confrontation is when I think his mom sent me a letter and said since I was young and was single, they were gonna come and take her [Jasmine] and my response was send the address so I know where to ship your body to because this is my child. That kind of cut off all [of] our communication.

Although, there was no involvement from Jasmine's father, Pamela took being a mother to Jasmine very seriously. As she recounts her experience with Jasmine's father and his family, I sense the anger and disbelief in her tone of how they [his family] actually wanted to take Jasmine away. Even though she was 18 at the time, Pamela was able to recognize that it was her responsibility to be a mother to Jasmine.

I did the best I could. In the third interview we discuss the topic of success. I asked Pamela if she thought of herself as a successful person. She replies, "I consider myself a very successful mother, kind of somewhat as an individual, yes. I'm pretty pleased with where I stand in my life." I then probed by asking Pamela to give me her definition of success.

Success is having to raise four children and they have respect for other adults. They have respect for themselves. They know how to appreciate the value of a dime. Wanting more out of life than they had, I think that's very successful as a person, as a mother. When you can be a single mother and having a rough time, being completely homeless, having children that have got educations, and doing very well with their lives. I think that's successful.

After Pamela provides her definition of success, she shared how she contributed to Jasmine's educational success.

Somewhat I did. I mean I think if you're a mother, as long as you're talking about education and letting them know that it is of great value to in life, that's contributing, I might have done more if I had a better education, but as far as just contributing, I did the best of my ability.

Pamela feels that she is has been successful as a mother and person. She also implies that she contributed to Jasmine's educational success by encouraging Jasmine to get a better education than she did. She is glad she was able to influence Jasmine to get an education.

I'm happy with the outcome. Pamela reveals that she would not change anything about her participation in Jasmine's educational experience. She is aware of her limitations regarding education and did what she thought was best for Jasmine.

I really don't know because she has a great educational experience. She finished high school. She finished college and I know a lot of mothers that were my friends that I grew up with that have children her [Jasmine] age. They don't even have a high school education and didn't even think about college. I don't know what more I could have done with the education, if I had a better education, I could probably just rattle off some things, but with my limited ability of education, I don't think I could do it. Because of, even some of her homework, I wasn't able to help her because I didn't know.

Even though Pamela is happy with Jasmine's outcome there were times when she was unable to provide support for Jasmine.

My main thing is my lack of education, when you're not able to do it, you definitely can't help the next person. I could tell her things about life and the importance of education, and I've always told them that I have limited ability. I'm not proud of my not getting an education, but I'm not ashamed of not being able to help her with her homework because I didn't get an education.

Although Pamela lacked in the realm of education she was able to support them with life lessons.

I mean, as far as life lessons, yes, I did. As far as being a lady, being respectful, you know, that's my main thing, respect, appreciate, respect for yourself, respect for others and have appreciation of whatever, just little values in life. As she educated herself through life better than beyond what I could do, you know. If she had any questions or anything, all I could do was answer the best of my ability, what I knew.

I appreciate how candid Pamela was about her lack of education, yet proud that she was able to be the kind of mother she was to all four of her children. She did not let her mistakes affect the love and support she has for and with her children.

I wanted her to have a better life. Pamela discusses that her dreams and aspirations were for Jasmine to get an education and have a better life than she had.

I didn't really have any expectations other than wanting them to better their life. A better life than what I had and what I was able to give her. I wanted her to have more and to know that in order to get more, you had to get an education, and you also had to work. I remember many times, when I used to go to work all the time, and they was like "why do you work?" I would reply, no worky, no eaty. You got to work. You got to eat and to live to have more. If you want something out of life, you have to get an education. You have to get it, to get anything you have to have an education to be able to get what you want out of life.

Pamela is proud that Jasmine rose to those expectations and exceeded them by attending college. She always knew Jasmine would be successful because she was very smart.

Jasmine's always been a very smart person, you know I used to tell people that my child is so close to a genius, that if I knew a genius, I could tell you if she is or not. She was always a straight A student, I remember, I think she was in Junior High, and came home, and she had a B and you would think the world

was about to end, because she was just destroyed over it. She's always been a strong person in education. I've always looked at her as being a big kahuna in some company, running something or being in charge. I mean to me, she probably wants more, I'm sure she does, just by what I see of what she's done for herself.

I am so proud, I mean, I still brag today. I got her diploma and stuff. She tells me all the time, "Momma, you're not supposed to brag." If I could take off my arm and pat my own self on the back, because of my input in being strong to tell her this is what you need [education]. I am so thrilled with what they've done, what she's done with her life. And I know that she's continued to educate her siblings, her nieces and nephews, and I'm just very happy and very proud about that.

There are times when Pamela looks to Jasmine to play the role of mother in her life today.

Sometimes I'll tell my mom or her sister that when she tells me something, I'll say, you know what my momma told me. I really be talking about Jasmine. [laughter] She's got that mother instinct even though she's not a mother and she's very, very strong on education.

As I begin to feel the sense of joy and excitement in Pamela's voice as she continued to talk about Jasmine, I asked her to just sum up of her feeling on Jasmine, the daughter.

My daughter, she's very caring; she's very loving; she's very giving. She would give you her last dime. She's there for other people, and like I said, I sometimes say she's the mother because if I do something that maybe go a little bit beyond what I should, she's like "Mother!" and then I'm, okay, well my momma said I can't, this is all I can do. I couldn't be any prouder. I mean, for any mother to have a daughter like Jasmine, would be on top of the world. Like I said, I continue to brag on Jasmine. She keeps me grounded because I have a tendency to be a loose cannon. I'm happy to say that when she has; she doesn't have big problems, but little problems. I'm very glad that she feels that she can come and talk to me, because I do know some daughters can't talk to their mothers. I'm

very happy that she will come and talk to me instead of calling her aunt or somebody else and asked them for advice. Even though she's very strong, she's going to do what she wants to in the end, but she will occasionally ask me for advice. She's a great daughter, she's a lovely daughter, I don't know, I could go on and on. She's just a wonderful daughter and I'm very proud to have her as my daughter.

At this point, we sit in silence for a moment in order to allow Pamela to reflect on her expression of Jasmine. It is breathtaking, the love Pamela feels for Jasmine. In this moment, I sense how sincere Pamela is about wanting Jasmine and her other children to have a better life than she had.

Take care of your own children. As we end the final interview, I asked Pamela what her advice is to all the mothers who may not have finished high school and are single mothers. She replies, "Take care of your own children." Pamela understands the challenges of being a single mother with no formal education. She encourages single mothers to never give up.

Do the best of your ability. Take care of your own children. Don't send them off and get someone else to raise your child. Be the best mother you can, be there at all times. Because I do know a lot of mothers, the younger generation, they do tend to say "oh I need a break from my children." How do you need a break from your children? The break is when they're asleep and that's your break. When you have time to relax, say a little prayer, that's the break mother's need. If you want to be an effective mother, be a mother, no matter how hard it is, how hard you think when you say, I can't make it, you can make it, you can make it. I wasn't in the church all this time, but I've always believed in the Lord, and I'm a strong believer that he's not going to put any more on you than you can bear. Take care of your children and be a mother, be a mother no matter what. Put your children first. Put your children before you put yourself. When your children grow up and leave home, then you can be who you want to be, but when you have children in

your home, they are first, with everything with the food, with the clothing, money, anything, children [are] first. And then, I think, if a mother puts their children first, I don't care, put them on a pedestal, be a mother, don't spare the rod, because I know the way life is, you can't hardly whoop a child, but I do know that you can call the law and ask them to witness the whooping. Let them witness it, you won't get in trouble, so don't think they can do whatever they want to because of the law, it don't work like that. A lot of children think, I'll call 911, I'll call Child Protective Services, but you call them first, have a firm hand and be a mother.

Pamela was able to address cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment through dialogue. Pamela is a straight forward no nonsense woman, who tells it like it is with no mixed messages. First she instilled in Jasmine that she was Black, period. Pamela's rationale stems from the one-drop rule. The one-drop rule is a colloquial term used in America for the social classification of Blacks. It is an example of a hypodescent, which is defined as the automatic assignment of children of a mixed union between ethnic groups to the group with the lower status (Kottak, 2002). Pamela passed this belief on to Jasmine communicating to her that no matter what her appearance was she is Black. According to Lykes (1983) a Black mother might teach her daughter she is just Black or just a female. This supports Pamela's experience in the sense that she concentrated on Jasmine's Black identity rather than Jasmine just being a female.

Second, Pamela endured by doing the best she could for Jasmine. She admits she had a hard life being a single mother with four children by the tender age of 21. Pamela held three jobs at one time to provide for her children and reveals that her children understood what she sacrificed for them. I believe what impressed me most about

Pamela's endurance was the fact that she did it on her own. She held steadfast to her belief that Jasmine and her younger siblings were her responsibility and no one else.

Finally, she was able to empower Jasmine by encouraging her to get an education. Pamela understood that if Jasmine got the education, she would have a better life than what Pamela had and was able to give her. Pamela believes that Jasmine listened to her because she wanted more for herself and wanted to be an example for her younger siblings. Pamela decided that even though she was not empowered by her mother, she would empower her children.

Pamela's portrait highlights the importance of striving to give your children more than what you have experienced. In spite of her being a single mother who did not graduate from high school, there was something from within her that wanted her children to finish high school and perhaps attend college. Jasmine, her daughter rose to the challenge. Even though Pamela did not graduate from high school, she was able to understand her mistakes and correct them with her children. She realized that some of the choices she made when she was younger limited how she progress in life at a later age. She used that understanding to make sure her children knew that education was a very important tool to have in order to have greater opportunities in life.

By examining Pamela's educational and life experiences as a single mother without a high school diploma we can understand the importance of wanting what is best for your children, in spite of the obstacles parents may face in their own lives. Pamela's portrait lets us know that no matter what your mistakes are as a parent, there is still an

opportunity learn from mistakes and encourage your children to be and do better than what they had. Ultimately, it was her love and dedication to ensuring her children would have a better life that allowed her to participate to the best of her ability to influence the educational experience of Jasmine.

Chapter Eight: A Portrait of Rita (Doctoral degree)

“I didn’t want to be in poverty.”

Rita was recommended as a participant by my current supervisor. When I sent out my recruitment email, she responded and encouraged me to reach out to Rita who has a doctorate. Rita resides in Trenton, New Jersey, so I conducted three 1-hour phone interviews to collect data for this portrait. Although my intention was to interview Rita about one of her daughters, Rita’s dialogue always encompassed all three daughters. This let me know as the researcher, she wanted to talk about all three daughters not just one. As the researcher, I respect the data and this portrait discusses all three daughters throughout the interviews.

When we spoke on the phone during the first interview, I asked her to tell me about herself. She elaborated:

I am the mother of three daughters. And my family is an interesting family because there is 16 years between daughter number two and daughter number three. I would say that the whole time I was raising my children, I was going to school and the reason that I have pushed so hard to educate myself is because I merely did not want to, I didn’t want to be in poverty. The only way that I could see that I could be a single mother and still be able to pull in the kind of income that would allow me to have a good quality of life was to increase my education.

So I grew up in Trenton, New Jersey and I have a very strong mom who always encouraged me to go toward education. She, you know, there was never any question in my mind that I would go to college because she said that if she had to scrub floors so that my sister and I could go to college, then that would be what she would do. I grew up in a home where I had a strong mother, a really good and stable father and they encouraged us to do well in school and look toward college.

The other part of it was, to be a teacher! When anybody talked to me about my career goals and my career education, it was kind of like instilled in me, “well, you’re going to go to school, go to college and you’re going to be a teacher!” And so I didn’t question that until I was actually in front of 30 first graders and realized what I really wanted to do forever. That’s when I shifted into counseling, I have a Master’s in student personnel and then the reason I went on for a Doctorate was because of a person that I call the transformational person in my life who encouraged me to come to this private university and to work on my Doctorate, it’s not something that, I’m not sure I would have done it if I hadn’t met him.

As I listen to Rita tell me about herself, I am instantly impressed with the fact that she was a single mother with three girls and presently the oldest two daughters have both a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree and her third daughter is a senior at a public university majoring in chemical engineering. As I probed a little more about her family history, she has been married twice. I asked her was she a single mother with all three daughters, she reveals, “All three. There were two marriages, but neither of them worked.”

In this portrait I explored how Rita participated in the educational experiences of her three daughters while juggling single motherhood, working full-time and getting her doctorate in the process. In addition, the researcher is able to identify Rita’s parental involvement and explore the experiences, behaviors, and actions as she raised her daughters. First, the portrait highlights how Rita communicated and interacted with her daughters about education from early childhood through high school. Second, the portrait investigates if Rita used any resources from outside the home regarding her

daughters' educational experiences. Finally, the portrait illustrates how Rita addressed the concerns of racial identity, endurance, and empowerment within herself and with her daughters in the context of educational success.

Communicating and Interacting with Her Daughters

Respect the gift of children. During the first interview I asked Rita what her philosophy on motherhood is, she replies, "to respect the gift that children bring to the world." Rita believes that one of her responsibilities, as a mother is to cultivate the strengths of her children.

When I discover what those gifts are, whether they're musical gifts or sports gifts or artistic gifts or gifts of intellect, then I start trying to develop that particular gift. I talk to my daughters about anything, just very openly and I listen to them very intently in terms of what they choose to share with me. I am always loving, always telling them how much I love them and I'm always encouraging them to work to their full God-given potential.

By encouraging her children to work to their full potential, Rita believes this philosophy has allowed her to be an effective mother. She reflects on her effectiveness as a mother.

I believe that I was, and still am, an extremely effective mother. My older two daughters both have completed Master's degrees. The oldest daughter, she works for the city. She also teaches courses at a county community college in her area and she has an undergraduate degree from an HBCU. She has a graduate degree from a private university in Pennsylvania. At this point she has two sons, and she makes a good living. She's married and she works really hard on that marriage.

My second daughter has a degree in Chemistry from a private university in New Jersey and she has a Master's in Environmental Management from a public university in New Jersey. She works for a corporation, she does border quality and environmental management, and she has three sons and she's also married.

The third daughter is a senior at a private university in New Jersey; she's a Chemical Engineering major. Her last semester [fall 2010] in college, she made a 3.8 grade point average. She traveled to China last summer as part of an engineering delegation of engineering students from around the world. She has a life at college where she works extremely hard but she also parties extremely hard. She seems to have a good time and good friends. She has boyfriends, but nobody serious yet.

So you know, I think the outcome of having good and steady educational goals, because these were my goals and their goals, and all three of them go to church. Both of my older daughters go to church. Their children are involved in choir, their various activities. I think as evidenced by their strong relationships with their husbands and families and their educational outcomes and their being productive in their jobs is evidence of their success and my success as a mother.

As Rita describes the educational accomplishments and life accomplishments of her daughters, I am convinced she has been very effective as a mother. Her participation through encouragement and leading by example has proved to be an effective tool in the daughters' educational success.

Rita's goals as a mother complimented her effectiveness as a mother. She wanted her daughters to be healthy and not get pregnant.

My goals as a mother, we grew up in an urban area, I wanted to keep them [my daughters] from getting pregnant before they were old enough to be able to manage home and a family. To my knowledge I did that [laughter]. I don't know everything, but to my knowledge, they did not have children when they got married. And I also wanted them to go to college, I wanted them to be healthy, and I wanted them to be able to take care of themselves.

Rita wanted her daughters to be successful managers of their lives. In order to make this happen Rita made sure she encouraged and nurtured each daughter's respective strengths to help mold them in to the individuals they are today.

I've come a long way. Rita considers herself a successful person given the road she had to travel to become the person she is currently. She explains her definition of success,

I guess I define my success based on how far I've traveled from the time I was growing up until now, and so when you think about somebody who grew up in the projects and now has a doctoral degree, and a top level job at a college, I think that that is success, especially success for my entire family. I guess I'm the first one in my family to be called doctor. I have a cousin who is a physical therapist. She got that degree like two years ago. It's defined by the distance that I had to travel.

Rita also admits she has been successful as a mother and raising her children.

I think I'm successful as a mother, I have three daughters who, at this point, have all finished college. Two out of the three have their Master's degrees and the third one will start her Master's in the fall [2011]. So I think in terms of a mother, raising productive kids, I think that's a real success indicator.

Rita's contribution to her daughters' success began with her setting a standard of behavior for them by pursuing her own education while raising the girls. Rita's daughters were able to see their mother study and remain committed to getting her master's degree and doctorate degree.

Well, you know, setting a standard for them because they saw me studying a lot. I may have mentioned when my daughter said, "You know, because of you, I study all the time," and I said, I don't make you study, why are you saying that? And she said, "Because I see you study." So, I know that by just role modeling

and taking them to the library with me, taking them with their books to the library, had a lot to do with it. I think taking them to church on Sunday helped to give them some strength and some foundation for their standard of behavior. And the other thing, I would live life at great sacrifice socially, so, you know, I just wasn't involved with a lot of men. I had some good relationships, but not allowing people to get that close to me, and that close to them, because they were all three, beautiful girls, and I just felt that the first priority was to protect them.

Rita was able to be a role model for her children by actively participating in the educational process on her own. She even admits she has no regrets in terms of her participation in her daughters' educational experience. She states, "I can't think of anything that I would change. I think I made the right decision at the right time. Even the points when I decided to take them out of public schools, those were all good decisions, none of them I regret." Furthermore, by setting the standard by which education is the expectation she was able to empower her daughters to follow in her footsteps.

I tried to steer my daughters in the right direction. Rita mentions that she wanted her daughters to be self-sufficient and be able to survive in this society. She also reveals that she tried to steer her daughters in the right direction in terms of their strengths so they would be successful.

Well, my oldest daughter went to a camp at a school in Princeton. It was an all girls' school. Just a beautiful school, it sat out in the woods, the kind of place where the deer would come up to the window. When she had that camp experience, it was one of experiences where they took kids out of the city for the summer. When she went to that school, I thought to myself, I want her to come to this school, because it was just a beautiful place. And so, in terms of her going to high school, that's where she went. With the others, I wanted them all to be able to finish college and take care of themselves, to be able to take care of themselves and also to determine what their gifts were so they would be using

their gift to their own advantage career wise. And so, I tried to steer them into the direction where I perceived their strengths to be and to get them into careers where they would be happy to get up in the morning because they would be making a contribution. That's been the way that I've helped them move toward their whole educational journey.

Rita continues our discussion by sharing examples of how she has tried to steer her daughters. Sometimes they listened and other times they decided to make their own decision about which direction they chose. Either way Rita is happy with the educational outcome of all three daughters.

My oldest daughter: She went to an HBCU and then to private university, and she had applied to go to Columbia to work on her Master's and she decided that she didn't want to be in New York City, I said, why don't you just go over to the regional private university, talk to them and see what it would take for you to get admitted there, and she did. The lady talked to her for a few minutes and told her, "If Columbia accepted you, we'll take you." And they accepted her on the spot. That way she was in a closer metropolitan city, which in my mind is a much saner city and she really had a good experience over there. She was studying education, urban education, it was a kind of program where she had to teach during the day and then they came to school at night to process what they were learning during the day and they were adjusting their teaching in order to get a higher performance from the kids, and they had to be working in an urban area. That worked out for her.

My second daughter: She went to Rutgers and she came out with a degree in Chemistry. Then she went to an environmental management and she really loved doing that and she still works as a water quality chemist. She loves doing that, I tried to pull into education, get her to teach, but she will not. She likes the applied science field.

The baby daughter: She'll be going to a private university in the fall. And she's staying on this chemical engineering track.

Rita is very excited and feels her daughters have met her expectations and beyond. She expected them to get a college degree, but they have exceeded her dreams and aspiration. She states,

Oh, I couldn't be happier, I couldn't be happier. They have hit the mark.

Well, I wanted them to do well in school, but I didn't have to hound them to do it. You know, they seem to be real in touch with their intelligence and I guess, I feel like it's our responsibility to live up to the gifts that God gives us and so that if we are gifted intelligence then that's what we have to really strive to do our best in, and all three of them have been real scholars in the way they have approached education. In the thing about my youngest daughter, last semester, she had an attack of appendicitis, and she missed a week, week and a half, because she had to have surgery, then broke up with a boyfriend. There were several other things that happened to her during the course of this semester and I was afraid that she was going to really bomb the semester. She came out with a 3.8. That focused, just that focused. You know, and like I say, the pressure is not coming from me, not externally anyway. They all have that discipline and that sense of focus where they all go after what they do to be the best at it, but they know how to lean back and relax better than I do. I don't know how to do that. But they get that. They get that part of it.

I can tell by the sound in Rita's voice she is so grateful that her children have been able to thrive academically and socially. Rita's dedication to education and the sacrifices she has made have been rewarded in how successful her daughters have become in their own lives.

Rita was able to communicate and interact with her daughters individually and cohesively regarding their educational experiences from early childhood through high school. Rita cultivated the educational gifts of her daughters. She did this by listening to her daughters and observing their respective strengths and weaknesses. Next, she would

verbally encourage each daughter and then nurture their strengths according to their interests. Then she would try to steer them in the direction that would allow them to be successful. Sometimes her daughters listened and sometimes they did not. Rita understood it was all a part of life with adolescent girls.

Also Rita communicated through action. She set a standard of behavior for her girls by simultaneously pursuing her own education and raising them. For instance, there were many times when Rita would take her daughters to the library while she studied. This allowed her daughters to see their mother study and be committed to getting another college degree.

Resources outside the Home that supported Educational Experiences

School choice. Rita eventually chose private schools for all of her daughters to attend. Each daughter has a different scenario. However, Rita felt that private school prepared her girls academically and socially for the transition into college.

The Oldest Daughter: The main deciding factor in elementary was the school in our neighborhood. When they got to junior high school, my oldest daughter was offered an opportunity through a program called A Better Chance, and that program recruited kids out of public schools to independent [private] schools. So she had an opportunity to go to a private school in Princeton, and she was really excited about that and so was I. She actually went to that school in seventh grade I believe and she stayed there until after the twelfth [grade].

The Middle Daughter: My second daughter went, they all went to the same elementary school, and then she went to middle school in a public school. She was in a gifted and talented program. She was bussed across the city and then, she, at the 10th grade, I took her out and put her in a private school and the school

she chose was a Quaker school in Pennsylvania. Even though she commuted and it was a distance that was the school she felt comfortable in.

The Third Daughter: The third daughter, I actually took her out of public school when she was in 5th grade, and she went to a Friends school, a Quaker school, in Princeton, New Jersey until the 8th grade and then she stayed on that same track and went to the same school her sister went to.

Rita also reveals that she took advantage of her girls attending private school for different reasons, but they produced positive outcomes for her daughters. I am impressed with how Rita was able to recognize each daughter's individual needs and support them on their separate journeys in school choice.

Because we live in the city, with my oldest daughter, it was that she had an opportunity. With my middle daughter, it was that I was concerned about her friends beginning to get pregnant and she was like in the 7th grade and this seemed to be the behavior of people in our community. And then with my youngest daughter, it was that she was so bored in public school, she didn't want to go to school. In the school where I put her it was small and it had 8 to 12 kids in the class and she was able to get the attention she needed, and plus, she could move ahead if she wanted to. So, if at any point she was bored within her math class, she could move to, they had a 2nd grader who had math with 6th graders, that was not unusual. They had the flexibility to move her, the same request in public school, meant that then they were concerned about what would happen in the next year and what was she doing the next year and some of the other kids would want to move ahead too and those parents who put pressure on them, so by my trying to create a challenge for her intelligence, it always put me at odds with the people at that school, the administration. I began to feel like the problem, because I needed her to have a more enriched education, I thought it was a good, it made more sense to take her out.

Rita continued to be driven by her expectations of wanting her children to have an enriched productive education and to ensure their school environment allowed them to thrive.

I did not always work outside the home. During Rita's first marriage she stayed at home with her daughters. She explained that she was bored and frustrated being a stay-at-home mother.

When my older two daughters were three and younger, I was a stay-at-home mom. I remember just being totally bored with being a stay-at-home mom so that's when I went back to work on my Master's degree and the first papers that I wrote had to do with working moms. What is the affect on working moms, because we were living in a community where women stayed home, and my husband very much thought that women should stay home and take care of kids, and so I was losing my mind because I was bored at home all the time.

While Rita was in graduate school she did research on working mothers. During her research she discovered why she needed to join the workforce and earn money for her family and herself. During this discover her marriage dissolved.

When I went back to school, I found that the outcome of the research I was doing was that if moms are happy, the kids are going to be happy. If moms are unhappy being at home, then the kids are going to be unhappy being at home. And I was unhappy because we were having trouble making ends meet and I knew I had earning potential, so what am I doing at home talking to people who were watching soap operas all day? I went back to school; I was taking classes at night. He would be getting home in time for me to be able to go to school and so once that marriage broke up, I was working, it was like, it made the difference that we didn't have to suffer that we didn't have a lot of money because I was working and my income was going up, so it was always that I was always working and I always had good support for them because my family was close by.

As I asked Rita about her marriage dissolving she reveals that she is fine and her daughters are fine as well. The two oldest daughters have a relationship with their father and the youngest does not. The good news for Rita is that although her marriages did not work out and she is no longer a stay-at-home mother, she was able to further her education and enter the workforce as a self-sufficient person for herself and her daughters.

Activities were done inside and outside the home. Rita was able to balance activities done inside and outside the home with her daughters. Inside the home her girls participated in activities on the computer, reading, and mini-trips in their hometown. In addition, Rita would have her daughters accompany her to the library and they would study together.

Well, we always had a computer, probably one of the first families to have a computer. I always had software that would help them do their homework assignments. We had books and we read. We went to the library. Half the time when I was working on things, I'd take them to the library with me, and tell them to bring their homework so they could do their homework there. I'd help them with their homework. We always went to museums, like I said, museums, plays, cultural kinds of things. Like Alvin Ailey dancers, we went to see the Nutcracker Suite, anything else that might be coming that I thought they were interested in, I would take them. We'd always go to places like the Franklin Institute, which is a science museum, the zoo; we went to the zoo almost every spring. So, that stimulated a lot of conversation, a lot of thought.

I then asked Rita to tell me about one of most memorable activities with her daughters.

With the older two, I think when we went to California and we went to Disneyland out there. We went to Disneyland and we went to MGM and we went

to Tijuana. So that was a memorable experience. And then with the younger one [she was nine at the time] we traveled to France and we went to a wedding in the Alps and then we took a train across France and went to Paris. Went into the Louvre museums and took a boat ride on the Seine River, those kinds of things.

I am impressed that most of the activities outside the home were done with the intention to spark conversation and thought. Rita used these activities to stimulate her daughters to think and gain their own perspectives on their experiences. This provides evidence that Rita placed her daughters in different social contexts to have the critical thinking skills needed to determine how the experience enriched their lives.

I have a close-knit family. Rita was very involved with all three daughters. She also had tremendous support from her family while raising her daughters. She claims that she was there for everything, except when her oldest daughter graduated from high school. She explains,

When my oldest daughter graduated from high school, I was pregnant with the youngest daughter. And she [the youngest] decided to be born on graduation. [laughter] I couldn't go to graduation. I think that was one of the times when I couldn't support them, but most of the time, I was there, whatever they were doing, I was there. Basketball games, track meets, I was there.

Rita's family played an important role in helping out in any way they could to support Rita and the girls. In addition, Rita developed networks with the parents of her daughters' friends. Rita asserts that everyone did their part.

I had parents who definitely were involved. They would pick up from school. They would help me with shuttling them around. And there were also, I had a way of developing networks with their friends' parents. So that lots of times we could carpool together or my daughters would spend the weekend with them or

their daughters would spend the weekend with me, so that I could have some time to myself too. Then with my youngest daughter, the oldest daughters were involved with helping with her.

I also inquire about male role models in the girls' lives. Rita disclosed earlier in the interview that the father of the two oldest remained connected, but the youngest daughter did not have a connection. I was curious to investigate the roles Black males may have played in the girls' lives.

Well, my dad, while he was alive, he was certainly involved. He was certainly a role model. There were always role models at church and I have other relatives. We place a lot of value on celebrating together, so people's birthdays, when something happens that's good, we have a family gathering. In that process we have male role models, my uncle and I have two cousins that are, you know, my two cousins are older than I am, but they are always there and involved in helping to give support, they help me with getting cars fixed and making decisions about house repairs and things like that. So we have a close knit extended family.

Rita was able to draw upon resources outside the home to support her daughters' educational experiences. Rita was exposed to private schools when her oldest daughter was offered an opportunity to attend through a program that recruited public school kids. Based on the preparation the private school provided for the oldest daughter, this outside resource gave Rita the information she needed to make the decision that her two younger daughters would attend private school as well.

Second, Rita drew upon the resource of research. Since she was enrolled in graduate school while raising her daughters she was able to expand her knowledge in the literature she was reading. This additional insight from the literature gave Rita the

perspective that being a self-fulfilled mother would allow her to channel positive energy to her girls. By seeking out literature Rita was able to find additional ways to support her daughters' education.

Next, Rita used outside activities as a resource to promote her daughters' educational experiences. For example, she took her daughters on trips to the zoo, museums, and performing arts to stimulate conversation and thought about cultural awareness.

Finally, Rita used her family and friends as a resource to support and encourage her daughters. Her family played an active role in mentoring her girls about life and the importance of education. In addition, Rita developed networks with the parents of her daughters' friends that allowed for carpooling and sleepovers to alleviate Rita having to do everything by herself.

Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment

Be proud of being Black and fighting. Rita was taught at a young age by her parents to be proud of her Black heritage. Rita's mother was very influential in Rita's life by instilling her Black identity. Rita remembers the advice given by her mother in terms of being Black and proud as her first memory of racial identity.

When I was growing up, I grew up in the projects, and lots of times, because I'm the fair skinned one in my family, lots of times my mom would be talking about no matter what anybody says to you, you are Black and you're to be proud of being Black. Lots of times, I was in fights because somebody called me yellow. But at the same time I've always identified as a Black person because of the way

that my mom educated me to my community, my church, and also to the people I went to school with.

Yellow is a term used in the Black community to describe Black female with a lightest skin tone. The skin tone has a yellowish almost Caucasian-white look to it.

I then asked Rita to describe how it was for her to be the “yellow” one.

I think that when I was in junior high school, I talk about this now a lot when we’re looking at gangs and things like that. It was like, I had to fight, and I really felt like, for my own survival on the street, I had to fight. And lots of times, when I was fighting, it was somebody who had jumped me and at the time they were jumping on me, they were calling me high yellow or old yellow or something like that. So I had a lot of aggressive, negative, behavior coming toward me because of my skin color from my own people. But at the same time, it was not anything I ever ran away from, by the time I would be in the fight, I’d come out of the fight with a new respect from my peers in my community.

It was shocking to me that Rita had to fight her for her survival and her Black identity.

In that moment, I felt connected to Rita because as a Black woman I know what it is like to have the people in your community question your authenticity as a Black person. I then inquired about racism and if it had affected her in her life. She discloses that she has felt racism in her workplace.

It [racism] affected me when I first started working here. It started to affect me strongly when I started working on my doctorate and started applying for a job at the dean’s level. When I applied, I applied for two Academic Dean jobs, and in both cases, the people who got the jobs were White males with fewer, lesser credentials than me. When it comes to how people get into the academic side of things here, we had one African American male who just got, who was an acting dean, but when they decided to cut a position, that’s the position that they cut. It is still really hard for us [Blacks] to get in on the level of the Academic Dean,

even though our Vice President for Academic Affairs is African American now, but he was the first one ever to hold a leadership position here.

When the students' decide, it's not as difficult. The position I'm in now, has except for the very first student services dean has always been held by an African American.

As she speaks on her experience with racism in the workplace, I hear frustration in her voice. However, I can also sense in the tone of her voice those situations made her stronger and motivated her to do well.

I had to fight my peers. As Rita shares her own educational history and experiences.

I went to a school where I walked to school every day, so I guess it took me about 15 or 20 minutes to walk to school and in that elementary school, there were Black and White students at the time. When I left that school, I went to junior high and that was further from my house, and even though there were Black and Whites, there were more Blacks at the junior high level, but it was a really rough neighborhood where I went to junior high. Then in high school, there was only one high school in the city, so everybody went to that high school. And at the time I went there, it was mixed Black and White and also mixed economically because there were some of the townships outside of Trenton where students were bussed, so it was a good education at the high school, at that time.

I asked Rita how the schools she attended influenced her. She begins to describe that during her educational experiences she acted as if she were not smart because she feared that she would be forced to fight with her peers. I then asked Rita if she thought the fighting happened because she was from the projects or was it more so because of her skin tone, she states, "It was that, well, not only that but also because I was smart,

because I was getting on the honor roll.” Rita gives an example, “One of the things that would definitely happen is somebody [would] come up and say ‘oh you think you’re cute, you think you’re smart’ and then it’s on.” She explains:

Well, the elementary school, I think that I went along very well. I always did well in elementary school and I loved going to school. When I go to junior high, lots of times, one of the other reasons I would get beat up would be if I got on the honor roll. So if I was going to get beat up because I was on the honor roll, then I stopped working so hard. So I got to the point where a C was okay, and that kept me from getting an Black eye of what now everybody’s looking at as bullying, that was going on big time as far as what was happening to me in junior high school. It just got to the point where I could do more, but I didn’t. I didn’t work as hard in junior high. When I got to high school, it was a matter of picking it up a bit. I did get a New Jersey State Scholarship that paid for me to go to college when I left the area, so I did go to a historically black college.

Audra: I then asked Rita if her sister also?

Rita: She got into fights too, she was badder than I was, she could hold her own a little bit better, but after a while you just learn how to do it. My sister functions at a very high level at a firm, she’s a Vice President there and she said that if there’s one thing that taught her everything she needs to know when she’s working at the top of an organization like that, it was fighting after school. [laughter] and I agree with her, you don’t back down, you know, after a while you learn, do or die, that’s what it feels like.

Rita openly admits that she knew that she was smart but acted as though she wasn’t because she did not want to fight with her peers. She tried to do better academically in college.

Audra: Did you do better academically in college? Explain.

Rita: Well, I started out strong in college and then I pledged my freshman year in the spring, when I started pledging, I spent more time pledging than actually going to school and almost flunked out because of pledging. It was like a two semester pledge period. So then, it took me a long time, I didn't go back on line and it took me a long time to get my grade point average back to where it was. By the time I finished, it was back up over a 3.0, I was back on the Dean's list, but it took that long hard work going to school in the summer to correct what I almost lost during the first year.

I asked Rita what sorority she pledged and she replies, "I pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA)." I then disclose that I am in a sorority as well and we both laugh, understanding the sisterhood behind historically Black sororities. She then reveals her thoughts on the process of pledging during college.

I never went back on, I thought that after I had that experience, I said, boy, this is so much foolishness. It almost cost me my college career, my scholarship, everything. [laughter] These people were crazy. It never made sense to me. When I finished that first part of that pledge period, I was like, this does not make sense.

I can tell by the tone in Rita's voice, she was rather disappointed in her pledge process. This is not to generalize the pledge process of any Black sorority or fraternity this only speaks to how Rita processed the experience.

I didn't want my daughters to fight. Since Rita experienced several fights in school as she grew up, she wanted to make sure her daughters did not have the same experiences. She reveals:

When I go one generation down and I go to a school and I ask the principal if being smart is valued, that was the one thing that was sticking with me in terms of the reason that a kid of mine might have to fight after school.

When it was time for her oldest to go to school, she actually interviewed the principal because she did not want her girls fighting.

When it came time for my oldest daughter to go to junior high, I went in and I interviewed the principal. I said to him, what is the value of learning in this school? I mean is it more important to, what is the value of being smart in this school? Is it more important to be smart or do the kids that go to this school value something else? And the principal paused, and he looked at me and he said, “Really they value other things. To them it’s not really that important that you’re smart.” I was looking for those elements in the community where my kids wouldn’t have to fight everyday if they were living out their God-given intellect. They stayed in the public schools for a little while, but with all three of them, at some point, I took them out and put them in private schools.

She discloses that she took them out of public schools because her daughters were afforded an opportunity to be in private school. Rita felt it would be in the best interest for her daughters socially and academically. As we came to the end of the interview, she comments on why she is glad she made it through high school without being judged harshly by school administrators.

I’m a school board member, and I think about it [fighting] a lot, because of kids and gangs. I know how we used to fight, but when it comes to kids now, they have guns and they kill each other doing the same kind of things, the same kind of survival. But at the same time, I was at a school board meeting and there were these girls that we were going to have to expel from school because they were fighting and they had knives. There were a couple of my colleagues that said, “these kind of girls, when they do this kind of stuff, they don’t have any business even being in school, we shouldn’t even be wasting a dime on them.” And I could not believe it, I sat there and I started to cry in that moment, and I said, I am so happy that none of you were judging my life when I was in high school. So when you think about what kids are going through on the street, and you just don’t know at what point something is happening to them, it may keep them from never walking in the kinds of steps that I walk in now, because there are

people shutting them down before they can even get to the point of exploring who they really are.

What I love about Rita in that moment, is that she remembers what her life was like when she had to fight and she remembers that someone gave her a chance to be successful. Her empathy allows her to want the same thing for other girls who need a chance to be successful. It is powerful message of never forgetting where you came from.

During the second interview, I asked Rita to explain her feelings when she had to send each of her daughters off to kindergarten. She began with discussing her oldest and then the two younger daughters.

The Oldest Daughter: I can remember being excited to send her off to kindergarten because she was happy to go to kindergarten. And you know she was just real enthusiastic to be there, but she had been in school for a while because she went to preschool. It wasn't like a big separation anxiety thing for either one of us, because she was excited to be going and so was I. I was always fortunate to have the support of my parents so, with her going to kindergarten in the morning, in the afternoon, they would pick her up and she would be with them until I came home. I don't remember any huge anxiety about her going to kindergarten, mostly excitement about it.

The Middle Daughter: My second daughter's a little bit quieter and so she wasn't excited about going to school, in fact she didn't talk a whole lot at all when she got to school, because she just wasn't really excited about being there or being involved with what was involved at the school. She had a kind of a learning disability, but it was a, it wasn't a speech impediment, but she pronounced her words differently so she had to go through some speech therapy for a while and she didn't like that. That was something that happened when she got to kindergarten but you know she was not vibrant and excited about going to kindergarten. And, lots of time, she would be the one that I would have a

difficult time leaving and separating from, because she wouldn't be happy when she was going to school.

My Third Daughter: My third daughter, she too had preschool experience and when she went to school, she's the type of person who flows along with whatever is going on. I can't remember her being real excited about going to school, and in that she was the baby, I probably had some anxiety about her going to school, but she just kind of went in and blended in with everybody else, got right down to work.

Rita gave all three daughters, the same message, "Just to work hard and to listen to the teacher." Additionally, she mentions that all three of her daughters were focused students academically. Then, Rita began to describe her experience when she sent her daughters to college.

My Oldest Daughter: My oldest daughter went to Hampton and my sister and I took her in a station wagon down there. It was like she was excited to be going to an HBCU, and I was excited for her. It was the kind of thing, when she went to college, my youngest daughter was maybe like 3 months old, so her going to college wasn't like, I was freaking out that she was leaving. It was like, my life was on such an over burden, and it was time for her to be going and left me two at home. [laughter]

The Middle Daughter: She went to a private university that was right up the road. When she got there, one of the things about her is that she would always make friends and she lived over on the main campus, so she just had a lot of people around her all of the time. She came home quite often too. She was attached to the baby [youngest daughter], so she would come home on the weekends and that would be helping me.

The Third Daughter: When she went to college, we, it was a matter again, of driving her up the road, like 45 minutes away.

When Rita sent her children off to college, she was happy, but it was also a fact of life for her girls. She states, “When my mother took me to college, she cried, for a week. But I don’t remember any tears when they went.” Rita understood it was time for her children to begin a new experience that would give them the opportunity to make a life for themselves.

Racial identity. Rita had a very interesting perspective on the race issue. When Rita encountered these types of issues with her daughters, she pondered the question; “Is it a race issue or a class issue?” She explains:

Once my oldest daughter went to private school, it was an issue because they were making an effort to integrate their school, to have more diversity in the school, because they understood that if they were creating an educational community, if they didn’t have diversity, it wasn’t going to be real for the girls that were there. And a lot of the girls that were there were very wealthy and they had all kinds of experiences. They would take Willy-nilly, exciting vacations when it was spring break and those kinds of things. So, when it came to how the girls were treated within that school, when race became an issue, the school was making a fairly strong effort to make sure that the girls that were recruited to come to the school, who were of various ethnic backgrounds, like African American, they were Latina, they were Muslim, they were Indian, and so they even [had] a psychologist working with the families and working with the girls for, to try to fix the issues that would come up.

One of the issues that would come up would be birthday parties. If it was at the girls who were wealthier, lived in the suburbs, and were inviting the whole class to the birthday party, no problem, if the birthday party was at their house. But if the birthday party was in Trenton, then the girls didn’t want to come, or the parents didn’t want to come. Then you would have to think about it. Is this a race issue, or is it a class issue? And it would come up to be both, but at the same time, the psychologist coming in and meeting with the parents, in the parents’ groups with everybody were able to begin to establish some boundaries and

some rules for how that was going to unfold. Like, if you have a birthday party, everybody should be invited to that birthday party. How can you tell parents, well, you can invite this kid, this kid, this kid, if you don't want to invite this kid, you have to invite him anyway. The psychologist made parents very aware of how that community was going to be working, and I was certainly involved in that work that was being done. In that school that was aware enough to meet the issues before they became issues.

She also had the perspective of race not being an issue.

If you're raising African American children, in an African American neighborhood, in an African American church and school, it doesn't become an issue you have to talk about.

She describes,

It's like if you're raised in neighborhood where everybody's Black, then being Black [is] not an issue. But when you put them into a community where they may not be as accepted then race becomes an issue.

Rita further disclosed that she supported her daughters in taking pride in their racial identity through role models, artwork and program activities.

I think when you have opportunities for, you know, to do research, what kind of research, what kind of role models are there, what kind of artwork do you have in your house? Those kinds of symbols of pride are there. They become centers for discussion. What kind of activities do you do on Saturday? You know, like we would go to the African American museum and they'd talk about some of the things that were there, just walking and talking. We would go to plays and various kinds of programs, if programs presented themselves.

Rita was able to reflect on whether her daughters were dealing with racial issues or class issues based on the type of environment they were placed in. I was able to detect that Rita believes her daughters were well grounded and comfortable being perceived as

Black children by society. Rita made sure she nurtured their racial identities both inside and outside the home.

Education allows you to live well. As Rita reflects on what her parents taught her about education, she had this to say:

It [education] was actually the only way to be able to improve your economic status other than that it was hard to be able to live well. Education was a tool for gaining a quality of life.

Rita shares that her parents were blessed to received a good education and attend a segregated school.

My parents went to a segregated school, they were both basketball players and they in terms of education; they got a good education. Neither of them went to college right after high school. My mom went back to college after I graduated from college and by the time she retired she had a Master's degree. My father didn't go back to college, he was a skilled laborer, carpenter.

Rita is grateful that her parents encouraged her to be educated in order for her to be self-sufficient in her life. Rita did not want to live in poverty and understood education was a tool that could keep her out of the projects and poverty.

College was always the expectation. In Rita's school experience going to college was always the expectation. She reveals, "because that is how I was raised." Her mother made it very clear to Rita that she would do whatever it took to support her education and ensure she was a productive member of society.

My mom didn't go to college right away. She went after me. But at the time that I was growing up there was never a question in my mind that when I went to high school, I was going to go to college. She always instilled that she was

willing to make whatever sacrifice she had to make for that to happen. It just meant that the way that our family values were, education was just real, real important. And the other part of it is, you know for us always to be able to be independent and take care of ourselves, and she did not feel like there was any way we were going to be able to do that unless we were well educated.

Since education was instilled in Rita inside the home with her mother, it was a natural expectation for Rita to pass on to her daughters. She states she has always talked with her girls about getting an education.

It was just a given. I would take them down to Morgan, to homecoming with me, to the games and things like that. As small children, we'd drive down there for that. I talked to them quite a bit about it. Even as, when I was working on my doctorate, they were in elementary, junior high school, they saw me just working all the time, being with books everywhere, all the time.

Rita was able to empower her daughters because her mother empowered her to excel in education. By passing the message on of the importance of education from one generation to the next, Rita's daughters were able to benefit and take advantage of the message that was instilled.

Give them your all. As our final interview comes to an end I asked Rita what her message was to all the mothers in America who may have doubts on whether they have what it takes to influence their daughters' educational experience. She replies, Give them your best.

I would say whatever you have to give, to give it to them. And I say it like that because I know there are people who just don't have it to give. They don't have the time because they may be working a lot of jobs, or they don't have the money. But I think overall the investment comes from the sacrifice. I would almost venture a guess that there's a direct correlation between the sacrifices that

you are willing to make for your daughters and the outcome of who they are. So that means money. That means time. It's like giving it all to them and it's like I have totally invested myself in my own education and satisfaction and them.

In Rita's words it is about the investment a mother is willing to make to ensure that her children reap the best opportunities in life. You get what you put in to your child's life. Rita believes that your children's wellbeing and education are worth the investment.

Rita was able to address concerns of cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with her daughters through dialogue, participation, and experience. In terms of cultural identity Rita believed there was no issue. She raised her children in a Black neighborhood, a Black church, and Black community. Her daughters knew they were Black; period. However she placed them in private school where her daughters were the minority and there where race and/or class issues. For example, did her daughters not get invitations from certain classmates because of race or class? Either way Rita was able to nurture and instill their Black identity by keeping them involved in the Black community through role models and program activities.

Second, Rita empowered her daughters by the life lesson she learned from her parents; education allows you to live well. Rita was able to pass this message down to her daughters by encouraging them to fulfill their potential by being educated, which has allow her daughters to be responsible and self-sufficient Black women.

Finally, Rita showed her daughters endurance by continuing to invest the time in their well-being and educational future as she raised them. She gave her all to them and sacrificed some things in her life for the betterment and success of her daughters.

Rita's portrait highlights the importance of investing in your children's future. Although Rita grew up in the projects and had to fight with her peers because of her intelligence, she was able to receive support from her mother who instilled that education would have a positive impact on her life if she stuck with it. In the midst of two failed marriages Rita was able to persevere and lead by example with her daughters on the importance of being self-sufficient and productive members of society. In addition, Rita's portrait revealed that when a mother is willing to invest in her children, the reward can go beyond all your expectations and dreams.

By examining Rita's educational and life experiences we are able to understand Rita's focus and determination not to live in poverty. Ultimately, it was her willingness to share her intimate experiences, behaviors, and advice that make her the successful mother she is regarding her daughter's educational experiences.

Chapter Nine: Analysis

In this chapter, I analyze my findings for the portraits of five Black mothers, who were single while raising their daughters from early childhood to high school. The transcribed data were coded to identify themes across the interviews conducted with the mothers. After I completed the coding and immersed myself into each portrait, I discovered salient themes connecting all the mothers regardless of educational level. I also found themes that varied among the mothers as well. Next, I reported on the three emerging themes discovered during data analysis. These categories were derived from the three research questions for my study. The first category considers how the mothers communicated and interacted with their daughters. The second category explored whether or not the mothers used resources outside the home to support the educational experiences of their daughters. The third category examined how the mothers' address cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with their daughters.

Communicating and Interacting with their Daughters

The themes that I discovered regarding how all the mothers communicated and interacted with their daughters are: support, love, encouragement, motivation, talking with her, and being present in their daughter's lives. To maintain confidentiality, I use pseudonyms to identify the mothers.

The first set of similar quotations is related to "support" and include responses from each mother.

I wanted to make sure that she knew from day one if nobody else in this world has her back, her momma will always be there for her, bottom line. If somebody is wronging you, you don't have to take care of that, I'll take care of that, you do what you need to do. (Synclaire)

I wanted to make sure they had the things they needed. (Rachel)

As a mother, my goals were just to make sure that my child or children, one [in] particular, my daughter was, getting the support she needs from me as a mother. My goals are also to financially support her and make sure she stays healthy. To make sure she gets the best education and make sure that she grows up to be a respectful woman that I would want her to be and then when she is grown, still be able to have that support coming from her mother. (Megan)

I taught my children right from wrong and the consequences from the beginning. No mixed messages. (Pamela)

I am always loving, always telling them how much I love them. I wanted them to be healthy, and I wanted them to be able to take care of themselves. (Rita)

The mothers expressed support in different ways, with the same intention of making sure their daughters understood they [mothers] were their backbone and foundation during their educational and life experiences in childhood and adolescence. The support could be financially, verbally, emotionally, mentally, or even as a life lesson.

The second set of quotations is responses from the mothers related to "love."

She is the best thing I ever did. To me everything that's good and right and all the best parts of myself are in her and I can tell by the people she chooses to surround herself with, the way she conducts herself, the way other people relate to her, the way other people are drawn to her, the way she is around elders, the young kids, people just generally like her and I can see that. In seeing that, that lets me know that I had to have done something right. (Synclaire)

We packed up early that morning [as she headed off to college], loaded up the truck, got her situated. They had people at the campus that helped to carry out things because she just happened to be on the second floor. That was a very, very busy and long day. She was very excited until it came time for me to leave, then she didn't want me leaving and that's when all the tears came. (Rachel)

[On motherhood] I see an individual who is loving. This person can't be a selfish person. This person must be willing to give up the smallest amount of food that is on their plate to their child. A mother is someone that is willing to be unselfish, caring, loving, and supportive to their child. (Megan)

Oh man, proud, I guess you could say proud was the word. I don't know what other word I could use but like I say, it was just like a ray of sunshine. I told everybody, my daughter goes to State University, you know, she's this, this, and this. She used to tell me, "Momma, you brag too much, you ain't supposed to brag." Well, as a single parent I felt like with my education or lack thereof, I had the right to brag. (Pamela)

I am always loving, always telling them how much I love them and I'm always encouraging them to work to their full God-given potential. (Rita)

As I painted each portrait of the mothers, I could feel the love exuded by them.

Each mother was able to find the expression of love that worked best to suit their daughters' needs.

The third set of quotations from the mothers is related to "encouragement."

You've got to give them the opportunity, you've got to encourage them to go to school, you've got to encourage them to do good. There's no excuse to not give your child every opportunity in this world to be successful and that's what education does, it grants them every opportunity in the world to be successful. (Synclaire)

I wanted to be good role model to them. I always knew that I wanted to be the type of mother that was present, that knew what was going on and talked to them

[both daughters] about what was going on and make sure I was there at their different events because that's not something that I had. (Rachel)

I also wanted her to be well rounded, so sometimes she didn't want to participate in sports, but I said you need to try it, just try it and see if you like it. Because she went to a Catholic school, it was small and they didn't have that many students, you made the team; it wasn't like there was a tryout. I got her into that, she was good in running track, but didn't like it, so I at least said, okay, once you started something, you don't quit, but you're going to finish it out and once you finish it out, you don't have to do it again. (Megan)

First of all, my main goal was to get them a better education than I had. It wasn't that I couldn't get a better education; I just didn't, being hard headed and not having a parent pushing me. So that was my number one goal to make sure they got an education, at least high school and college if possible. (Pamela)

When I discover what those gifts are, whether they're musical gifts or sports gifts or artistic gifts or gifts of intellect, then I start trying to develop that particular gift. I'm always encouraging them to work to their full God-given potential. (Rita)

The mothers encouraged their daughters by ensuring they had well-rounded experiences, by pushing them when they needed to move in a certain direction, by steering them in a positive direction to cultivate strengths, and talking to their daughters.

The fourth set of quotations from the mothers is related to "motivation."

That's why I really pushed myself because I wanted to make sure she knew who I was. I was about providing her with everything I could so that when she looked back on it, she wouldn't have that gap, that disconnect that I had from my mom. She would know, know all about me and she wouldn't have to wait until she was in her 20s or 30s to start building a relationship, the relationship would already be there from day one. (Synclaire)

I did know that I wanted to be a mother who was present in Lakyn's life. I think that was something I wanted and never had, so I wanted to make sure that I was that type of mother. (Rachel)

I think that I tried to be effective. I have to go back to where I spoke about how I didn't take it [education] seriously. I just went to school. Not that I didn't enjoy going, because I enjoyed going to school but it wasn't for the education until later on in life when I was in college, when I started taking education seriously. I wanted her to immediately take it seriously and let her know that this [education] is something. (Megan)

I guess my roughness was really because I didn't have any parent to force me to get an education or tell me how important an education was. I did what I wanted to do on my own when it came to education. So that was my number one goal to make sure they got an education, at least high school and college, if possible. (Pamela)

She [my mother] always instilled that she was willing to make whatever sacrifice she had to make for that to happen. It just meant that the way that our family values were, education was just real, real important. She, you know, there was never any question in my mind that I would go to college because she said that if she had to scrub floors so that my sister and I could go to college, then that would be what she would do. The reason that I have pushed so hard to educate myself is because I merely didn't want to be in poverty. (Rita)

Each mother was motivated by her own personal experience about education.

Whether the outcome was negative or positive, the mothers' experiences served as a blueprint to motivate their daughters on the importance of education.

The fifth sets of comparable quotations are related to "talking with her."

She's my only kid, I talked to her from the very start as if she could understand and was an adult. We grew up together. Wrong, right, good, bad or otherwise, now, and there was some consult in there like, if you're wrong, I'm going to get in your butt, but I got your back. (Synclaire)

She was really nervous about being away from home then. It's like she's always had a good head on her shoulders so I didn't really have too much [to] worry about her getting into trouble and all that kind of stuff. I've always preached that stuff at home so I wasn't too concerned about that. (Rachel)

We did talk about both sides because some people take whatever they're interested in now and they stick with it for the rest of their lives and then some people go so far as college and once they graduate they change everything, their whole career and everything. We talked about both ways the way education can follow you and be a part of your life and how it is important in your life. (Megan)

I would tell her, you know these people out here that you clown around with, they got an education you know, and you don't want to be left behind. (Pamela)

I talk to my daughters about anything, just very openly and I listen to them very intently in terms of what they choose to share with me. I am always loving, always telling them how much I love them. (Rita)

Each mother was able to express life lessons and experiences to their daughters through dialogue. Each mother had a distinct way of connecting with their daughter while talking with her about life and education.

The final set of equivalent quotations is related to "being present in their daughter's life."

I was going to be the first person she saw, there was going to be no doubt, nobody else was going to get to take that title; that was mine. And I was going to work hard and make sure I fulfill that. (Synclaire)

I always knew that I wanted to be the type of mother that was present, that knew what was going on and talked to them [both daughters] about what was going on and make sure I was there at their different events because that's not something

that I had. I had to be very careful as far as dating, as far as the type of people I had them around, and as far as whether or not I was going to go out partying. They watch everything you do and it's hard for you to do a certain thing and once they're at a certain age and want to do it, and you say, no, you can't do that, but "mom, you did it," so I was always very conscious of that. (Rachel)

I said, you need to make sure you study. I even gave her study time when she got home. (Megan)

I wanted to be the best mother, to teach respect to [my] children, teach appreciation, mainly respect and appreciation. And the education that I didn't get. (Pamela)

Well, you know, setting a standard for them because they saw me, studying a lot. I may have mentioned when my daughter said, "You know, because of you, I study all the time," and I said, I don't make you study, why are you saying that? And she said, "Because I see you study." So, I know that by just role modeling and taking them to the library with me, taking them with their books to the library had a lot to do with it. I think taking them to church on Sunday, helped to give them some strength and some foundation for their standard of behavior. And the other thing, I would live life at great sacrifice socially, so, you know, I just wasn't involved with a lot of men. (Rita)

Each mother found a way to be present in the lives of their daughters. Whether it was being an active example or sacrificing behind the scenes. These mothers found a way to nurture and be actively present for their daughters.

In summary, these mothers were able to communicate and interact with their daughters in a positive manner and instill the importance of education and the opportunities that it could provide in their daughters' lives. Although each mother had a unique method for communication and a different personal experience, it did not

overshadow the goal of making sure their daughters understood the importance of having a strong, solid educational experience.

Resources Outside the Home To Support The Educational Experience

The themes that I discovered on the resources the mothers used outside the home to support the educational experiences of their daughters are: school involvement, working outside the home, outside activities, and family/friend support.

The first sets of quotations from the mothers are related to “school involvement” at the daughter’s school.

I got really involved with the school and was on the PTA [parent teacher association], and on the campus advisory committee (CAC). I was on the committee to pick the new principal. She [new principal] was very, very interested in seeing her African American students achieve at a higher level. She [new principal] ended up getting with a lady who was starting a new magnet program here in the school district. They worked together to get a lot of the kids from that elementary school to go to the middle school to the magnet program. She ended up going into that middle school, even though it was out of our district and it wasn’t where she was supposed to go. (Synclaire)

I did not like the atmosphere of the parent teacher association [PTA], but I did a lot of the booster, a lot of fund raising, and you know different organizations like that. They just get in contact with the counselors and she did, she stayed in contact with the counselors. (Rachel)

I met other people that had also taken their kids out of Catholic school. I spoke with them and asked them how was their kids were doing? Some had good opinions about it and some didn’t. And then I even spoke with principals that were in the public school district and they actually told me “you need to keep your child in Catholic school.” (Megan)

A few times I did use someone else's address to get her [Jasmine] out of [attending a school]. If any one of them was in a troubled school, I would use my mother's address or something else, but most of the time they were in pretty good areas. (Pamela)

Because we live in the city, with my oldest daughter, it was that she had an opportunity. With my middle daughter, it was that I was concerned about her friends beginning to get pregnant and she was like in the 7th grade and this seemed to be the behavior of people in our community. And then with my youngest daughter, it was that she so bored in public school, she didn't want to go to school. In the school where I put her [youngest] it was small and it had 8 to 12 kids in the class and she was able to get the attention she needed, and plus, she could move ahead if she wanted to. (Rita)

The mothers were able to be involved in school choice in different capacities.

The mothers were able to step in and take the necessary steps to ensure their school experiences were positive. The mothers were active in participation and dialogue through networking, speaking to school administrators, and joining school organizations.

The second sets of related quotations are related to "working outside the home."

Before I got my degree, I was working for the school district. I was going to school and she was in school and my boss at the time, (who was the epitome to me of if I ever became a boss, I would be like him). [My boss] would let me take off work to go to school. He understood I needed to take off work to go to her parent/teacher conferences and basketball games and whatever else. (Synclaire)

I was very fortunate to get the job that I did. I got that job because some friends were going to apply for it and they asked me to go along and I got the job, they didn't. Anyway, that was, you know, kind of a blessing in itself, I don't know, just having the type of job that I did, just opened my eyes to a lot of things, and the amount of money I was making enabled me to do a lot of things had I not gotten that job. (Rachel)

He [children's father] cared for them and then we got a nanny. Then the nanny would pick up the kids from school, she would bring them home, she would feed them, make sure they did their homework and then that's when he would come and get them and then they would stay with him. (Megan)

When I went back to school, I found that the outcome of the research I was doing was that if moms are happy, the kids are going to be happy, if moms are unhappy being at home, then the kids are going to be unhappy being at home. And I was unhappy because we were having trouble making ends meet and I knew I had earning potential, so what am I doing at home talking to people who were watching soap operas all day? So once that marriage broke up, I was working, it was like, it made the difference that we didn't have to suffer that we didn't have a lot of money because I was working and my income was going up. (Rita)

Every mother, with the exception of Pamela, was able to use outside resources while working outside the home. Synclaire had a supportive boss at work. Rachel's job gave her unexpected financial stability. Megan was able to hire a nanny and get her ex-husband involved in their children's' lives. Finally, Rita used research literature as an inspiration for her career.

The third sets of related quotations are related to "outside activities."

I think my favorite [activity] was going to the park. We would go out, and that's the one thing about living here is that there's so many things to do, we would go out to one of the big parks and go exploring, climbing trees, she climbed more than I did, picking up bugs, and looking under rocks and going looking at the flowers, going to the zoo, anything with animals in it, we were all over it. She said something to me a couple of weeks ago, I think pretty much sums up our thing "You know what mom? We had the most fun doing some of the weirdest things that nobody else would ever think of doing," I like that. (Synclaire)

The park is something that we probably did almost every weekend. We did the zoos; we did the recreational parks like Astroworld, Six Flags, Sea World, places like that. (Rachel)

We decided to drive over to New York for just that morning. New York is a very exciting but busy place. My daughter, I want to say she was maybe just 8 or 9. We tried to get a taxi, there was four of us, and three of us were 18 and over. We were on the corner screaming “Taxi! Taxi!” and nobody was stopping. My daughter screams “Taxi!” and a taxi screeched to a stop and we still tell that story today, how we couldn’t get a cab, but she was able to get one [laughter].
(Megan)

When I was working different jobs, my part-time job [supported the family financially], to go out and do little game rooms or to the zoo or whatever we could do. (Pamela)

We always went to museums, like I said, museums, plays, cultural kinds of things. Like Alvin Ailey dancers, we went to see the *Nutcracker Suite*, anything else that might be coming that I thought they were interested in, I would take them. We’d always go to places like the Franklin Institute, which is a science museum, the zoo; we went to the zoo almost every spring. So, that stimulated a lot of conversation, a lot of thought. (Rita)

Each mother was able to participate in activities outside the home with their daughters. This reveals that time spent outside the home adds value to the overall educational and life experiences of the daughters.

The last sets of parallel quotations deal with “family and friends.”

I have my village and it really does take a village. I’ve tried to surround myself with like-minded people. I’ve always tried to surround myself with people who were trying to do things for themselves and better themselves. They can be examples to my daughter. It’s not where you start. It’s where you finish. They come from variety of backgrounds. I have friends who never struggled a day in their lives and some who are still struggling but they’re still going after it to this day. You can see every end of the spectrum and appreciate all that, so, yeah I have my village and I don’t know what I would have done without them. I don’t

know where either one of us would have been where we are today without all of them. (Synclaire)

My friend's family was a big, big support group for me. Her mom started babysitting for Lakyn when she was about 3 years old. I think she had her up until she was like 8 years old. Then when my friend and I moved to [the city] together, she babysat for me also and then she had a cousin who came, so she's been a part of that family, they've been a big help to me. When I was in my hometown, my two sisters, they were a big help. One of my sisters then moved to the same city I resided [in] and she was a big help also. (Rachel)

She gets it from both sides, from all angles, from friends, relatives, church. She gets that positive thinking, and also mentor[ing] that she needs in order to go on and go to college. If she had decided to not go to college, everybody would have wondered why, because it was there for her and everybody stressed it. (Megan)

Occasionally my mother and step-dad would, but no, I would not let them go off with anyone else. We pretty much did everything, like I said, we grew up together. We did everything together. (Pamela)

I had parents who definitely were involved. They would pick up from school, they would help me with shuttling them around. I had a way of developing networks with their friend's parents. So that lots of times we could car pool together or my daughters would spend the weekend with them or their daughters would spend the weekend with me, so that I could have some time to myself too. (Rita)

All the mothers were able to rely on family support as a resource outside the home for their daughters' experiences. The mothers, with the exception of Pamela, sought friends and other social networks as a resource as well. This illustrates the importance resources outside the home can provide towards a child's educational

experience. The concept of having a village (extended network) was instrumental and critical in both the mothers and daughters lives.

Cultural Identity, Endurance, and Empowerment for Daughter's Success

The themes that I discovered on how the mothers addressed cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment within themselves and their daughters were: perception of environment, racism, Black identity, endurance, talking with her daughter, daughter and father, empowerment, advocate, spirituality, and encouragement. These themes were separated into two categories. The first category explores the mothers' experiences and observations on their perception of their environment, racism, Black identity, and endurance. The second category investigates how the mothers' used their experience on perception, racism, Black identity, and endurance to influence their daughter's educational success through talking with her, daughter and father, empowerment, advocate, spirituality, and encouragement.

Mothers' experiences. The first sets of quotations from the mothers related to their "perception of environment."

You're judged on your height, your weight, the color of your skin, where you went to school, how you speak, everything about you. You're always going to have to work harder, you're always going to have to be smarter, you're always going to have to be better and it's sad that it's that way, but that's the way it is." (Synclaire)

You saw a lot more of the interaction with the [White] parents than you did with the Black children. That was different. You would see their parents [Whites] at the school, they'd be up there for this, up there for that, and you didn't really see that with the Black parents. (Rachel)

She never did look at herself as being a different color. She looked at herself as just having a friend that didn't look like her. (Megan)

I was surrounded by nothing but Black people since grade school. I knew what the Black Panthers were and I ran with them, so we didn't do other nationalities as a whole. Because I'm thinking, this is a battle between the Black and the White and I kept that going for a long time. (Pamela)

I grew up in the projects. It was like, I had to fight, and I really felt like, for my own survival on the street, I had to fight. And lots of times, when I was fighting, it was somebody who had jumped me and at the time they were jumping on me, they were calling me high yellow or old yellow or something like that. So I had a lot of aggressive, negative, behavior coming toward me because of my skin color from my own people. (Rita)

The mothers were able to express about certain perceptions of their environment that influenced how they viewed the world. Some of the perceptions were a reality for the mothers, while other perceptions dealt with how the mothers observed their environment.

The second sets of quotations from the mothers related to "racism."

It was at that church camp where I was first called the "N" word by him. He called me the "n" word, he told me to get away from him because he wasn't going to like no "Ns." It floored me, I was like, wait, why does that matter. I don't think I've ever felt like such "less than" in my life. I've been raised to feel like I'm smart and special and intelligent and all these things and then that one word, it just erased all of that. I mean it's been 30 years and it's still bugs me to this day that one word, said in that manner, it just rips up your identify away from you and makes you less than, instantly. (Synclaire)

I don't see it [racism] as ever being anything negative, for me. I can't say that I've experience a lot of the negativity. There has been some, but, I can't remember anything really bad. (Rachel)

I wasn't the only Black in the department but it was only two of us [Blacks] at the time and this lady [who was White] got to the point where she couldn't even work with Blacks, bottom line. So it was more like she was prejudiced towards Blacks and she really showed it. She didn't want to train me, she didn't want to have anything to do with me and not only that, when she did train me, she found faults in whatever I tried to do. Even the simplest things; if I asked her to repeat something, "Well you need to listen. (Megan)

It was hard for me to accept integration. But I came around; it was just very difficult for me to accept other nationalities in the same room I was in. I don't know, I guess I did grow up being prejudiced at a young age, which I didn't realize was being prejudiced, I knew I was a Black woman and we didn't do the White thing. (Pamela)

It [racism] affected me when I first started working here. It started to affect me strongly when I started working on my doctorate and started applying for a job at the dean's level. When I applied, I applied for two Academic Deans job, and in both cases, the people who got the jobs were White males with fewer, lesser credentials than me. (Rita)

Racism had an effect on all the mothers, with the exception of Rachel, who admits racism did not affect her. Pamela's experience highlights the fact that racism can work both ways in the Black and White world. Pamela's disclosure provides evidence that some Blacks in society have a prejudice against Whites much like the perceived notion of Whites being prejudice against Blacks in American society. It was interesting to see the variation of how each mother experienced racism.

The third sets of quotations from the mothers addressed "Black identity."

He was very vocal about the fact that he wasn't going to be anybody's 'boy.' And so, you know, he always taught me you don't bow down to anybody, you hold your head up high. They pretty much explained to me that people sometimes, when they can't hurt you physically, will do things to hurt you emotionally and you can either decide to let that determine how you're going to be or you can be better than they think you are. And that you can't control how people think, or see, or view you, all that you can control is your response to it and there are always going to be people who are going to think you're less than just because of the color of your skin, and your job is to keep right on moving and let them think whatever they're going to think and you do what you need to do. That would be where I got my pride of who I am. (Synclaire)

In second grade, they closed my school and I was integrated into the other school that's definitely when I knew for sure I was Black. Yeah, it was the skin color, the hair, definitely the way they dressed. I don't remember anything negative being said or done, going into the school, but it was definitely noticeable that you were different. It was definitely noticeable. (Rachel)

I realized that I was Black when I was growing up. The schools that I attended, the teachers were able to choose their students, and I really realized that I was Black when they called my name as Megan. When I walked in the classroom, not the first time, but the second and third time and noticed that I was the only Black kid in the classroom and I didn't understand why until I realized that it had to do with my name. I say that because the teachers were able to choose their students and they chose Megan and they didn't know that Megan was Black until I got in the classroom. (Megan)

I was raised around all Blacks and was aware of the fact that I was Black. I guess I realized at an age to realize you know, what nationality you are. I can't tell you what age. (Pamela)

When I was growing up, I grew up in the projects, and lots of times, because I'm the fair skinned one in my family, lots of times my mom would be talking about no matter what anybody says to you, you are Black and you're to be proud of being Black. Lots of times, I was in fights because somebody called me yellow, but at the same time I've always identified as a Black person because of the way

that my mom educated me to my community, my church and also to the people I went to school with. (Rita)

Each mothers' experience highlighted how they were taught to embrace their Black identity as Black females. Each mother portrayed how proud they were to be Black and accepted their Black identity as a part of life, with no shame.

The final sets of quotations from the mothers addressed "endurance."

I was like, there's no way I can juggle having a kid, going to school and all that, I'm just going to be stuck doing some crappy job forever even though I knew I wanted to go back to school. Unfortunately, we live in a society where before you even open your mouth, you've already been judged. I always felt that made me push myself because I want to bust down all the stereotypes of being Black. Being a female, being a single mom, you come with all these labels already attached to you and you are constantly knocking down doors anyway, some of the labels would still be attached whether I was Black or not, I'm still a female, I'm still a single parent, all these labels that come with it. (Synclaire)

I actually ended up getting a second job. I got a part-time job for a little while and then, that was a little hard because I did have a 7-year old at home at the time. I did sell Avon for a while because I could stay at home and she [second daughter] could go with me to do whatever I had to do and that helped out too, so I did have to supplement in other ways. (Rita)

I don't know if [it was] the stress of the divorce or stress of just working, because I traveled a lot or just a combination of it all. I was also going back to school to get my Master's and had two classes left and I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Going through cancer I decided to not hinder myself or handicap myself with the illness. I kept working up until I had to go to radiation every day. I kept traveling up until I had to go to radiation, chemo and surgery. After I would do a surgery, I would just get back on my feet and go back to work. (Megan)

When you can be a single mother and having a rough time, being completely homeless, having children that have got educations, and doing very well with their lives. I think that's successful. (Pamela)

I guess I define my success based on how far I've traveled from the time I was growing up until now, and so when you think about somebody who grew up in the projects and now has a doctoral degree, and a top level job at a college. (Rita)

The mothers endured many different experiences for their daughters to be successful. These mothers were able to persevere through cancer, homelessness, poverty, additional jobs, and other challenges and stayed strong for their daughters' educational experiences.

Mother's influence on their college daughters. As mentioned earlier, the mothers used their experiences to influence their daughters' educational experiences. This section highlights the themes based on the mothers' influence. The first sets of quotations from the mothers related to "talking with her." These quotations concentrated on how the mothers communicated with their daughters in regarding to their racial identity.

[Because of your race] you're [the daughter] always going to have to work harder, you're always going to have to be smarter, you're always going to have to be better and it's sad that it's that way, but that's the way it is. I told my daughter that we always had a strong racial identity as a family. (Synclaire)

When she went to school, even though she was around a majority of Whites, her church environment, her community environment was [a] Black environment. I kept her in the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority to let her know, you are a different color and there are different cultures and we do different things than the Whites. (Megan)

I can remember her coming home crying because one of the little girls' mothers had been really mean to her at their house or whatever. I do remember that. I remember her being made fun of because they felt like she had a big butt, and you know, just stereotypical stuff like that where they knew she was different. I just had to explain to her how everybody's different and it didn't mean just because you're Black that you have a big butt. Maybe we have a little more curves than most White people or Hispanic people, but there are some that are curvy, it's just different with different people. (Rachel)

We never sat down and had a racial talk, you know, just like when you're around Blacks, you know you're Black. Jasmine's dad is Puerto Rican and society says if you got a drop of Black blood in you, you're Black. (Pamela)

If you're raising African American children, in an African American neighborhood, in an African American church and school, it doesn't become an issue you have to talk about. It's like if you're raised in [a] neighborhood where everybody's Black, then being Black's not an issue. But when you put them into a community where they may not be as accepted, then race becomes an issue. (Rita)

All of the mothers spoke on how they approached racial identity with their daughters. Synclaire, Rachel, and Megan openly talked with their daughters. Pamela and Rita believed there was no need to talk about racial identity because being immersed in the Black community solidified their Black identity. What was salient with all the mothers is that each mother uses a strategy to prepare their daughter for a racist society, which including naming the daughter and choosing where the daughter would attend school.

The second sets of quotations from the mothers addressed "daughter and father." I asked each mother about the role the father's played in their children's' lives. Although this research focuses on Black mothers and daughters, I was interested in the dynamic of

the Black fathers' relationships with the daughters since each mother expressed different roles for the fathers.

As of right now, he's not [present in her life]. And that is by a series of things that he did and then didn't do and her decision at this point to not deal with that. I respect that. In the beginning it was kind of, she kind of went through the "why does he not care enough? Why does he not want to be around? Why does he not want to do these things?" We had to talk about, it had nothing to do with her, it was just where he was emotionally, mentally, maturity wise that, like I always tell her, you can't control how people act, all you can control is how you behave to their actions. (Synclaire)

None [no active role]. His mother and aunts were very active in her life and she knows the entire side of her father's family. (Rachel)

Their dad still is very active. By me not being raised with a dad, I felt that even though I got a divorce it was very important that my kids have their relationship with their dad, so I do not take any of what I have been through with him out on them by not allowing them to have their relationship with their dad. He is very active, he's still active, anything they need, want, he's just a phone call away. (Megan)

I think he saw her once. He was a military guy and I think his family at one time wanted to have contact with Jasmine. So they really didn't have any other contact with me other than through mail once in a while. Every year I would send them a school picture, I never got any response back after the first confrontation. (Pamela)

The first case [oldest daughter] yes, second case [middle and baby daughter] no. (Rita)

The third sets of quotations from the mothers were about "empowerment."

I've tried to instill in her a good personality and be respectful, treat people the way you want to be treated and I see that those things are manifested themselves on a daily basis. I think the lessons that I've tried to impart to her, she's gotten

them and she not only understands them but she tries to put them in practice, and by her doing that, she's constantly influencing people around her to want to do and be the same thing. She's always tried to give back and do things to help other people; she's really good about looking out for herself, looking out for those around her. (Synclaire)

I tried to make her understand the differences and the benefits of going and not going [to college]. She understands it. I know when she was in college she took an economics class and that was eye opening for her and trying to get them to understand what their future was going to look like. (Rachel)

I had to assure them that I wasn't going anywhere and that's how I ended up doing it. I just to keep moving and kept going. I didn't want them to see me in bed all the time, even though I did have some situations where I had to lay down and go to bed. I can only recall maybe four times that they actually saw me that way [very weak], and the majority of times, it was after surgery. (Megan)

Because I didn't get an education I pushed them towards an education and Jasmine has always been very bright, she wanted that education. I mean since kindergarten I always told them, you will finish high school, if I have to go with you every day. (Pamela)

It was just a given. I would take them down to Morgan, to homecoming with me, to the games and things like that. As small children, we'd drive down there for that. I talked to them quite a bit about it [education]. Even as, when I was working on my doctorate, they were in elementary, junior high school, they saw me just working all the time, being with books everywhere, all the time. (Rita)

The mothers were able to empower their children through conversations with their daughters and active participation in activities. Based on the data, the mothers felt it was important to empower their daughters about education.

The fourth sets of quotations from the mothers related to "advocate."

I can actually remember one incident in middle school with one of her teachers where it came to pass that the Caucasian kids were passing his class and the African American kids were failing across the board, every one of them. That prompted some phone calls to the principal, and directors, and other parents getting involved. We found out there [were] some biases. He didn't feel like these kids were smart enough to be in his class. He was holding the African American students to a totally different level and judging them definitely, more harshly, and in the end left the school when it was all said and done. (Synclaire)

The teachers had to provide the attention that we were looking for out of a teacher. So we kind of challenged the teacher, to step up to the plate, you need to teach our kids, I didn't feel like I should have had to challenge the teacher. (Megan)

I went in and I interviewed the principal. I said to him, what is the value of learning in this school? I mean is it more important to, what is the value of being smart in this school, is it more important to be smart or do the kids that go to this school value something else? And the principal paused, and he looked at me and he said, "Really they value other things. To them it's not really that important that you're smart." I was looking for those elements in the community where my kids wouldn't have to fight everyday if they were living out their God given intellect. They stayed in the public schools for a little while, but with all three of them, at some point, I took them out and put them in private schools. (Rita)

The data revealed that mothers with a college degree advocated for their daughters' educational experience contrary to the mothers with little or no exposure to the college experience.

The fifth sets of quotations from the mothers related to "spirituality."

Instilling a love for God. You're in church with the kid, you teach her about spiritual things, you teach them to respect their elders and teach them to, you know, I don't necessarily buy into the whole kids should be seen and not heard

thing because to me kids have a lot of interesting and important things to say, but there's a time and a place for everything. (Synclaire)

I put her in a Black Catholic church. So when she went to school, even though she was around a majority of Whites, her church environment, her community environment was [a] Black environment. (Megan)

I wasn't in the church all this time, but I've always believed in the Lord, and I'm a strong believer that he's not going to put any more on you than you can bear. (Pamela)

I think taking them to church on Sunday helped to give them some strength and some foundation for their standard of behavior. (Rita)

The mothers felt it was important for their daughters to have a foundation of spirituality that included God and church. These quotations indicated that spirituality was important to the mothers as they raised their daughters'.

The final sets of quotations are related to "encouragement."

At this point, she's in college. I know she probably will be getting her master's degree. Of course I encourage her to get her Ph.D., but you know, after a while, I know school kind of, it might be one of those things where she works for a while and then goes back to get her degree. I know she's going to graduate college. She's very, very focused on what she needs to do. She's enjoying the college experience, but she knows what the end result is. (Synclaire)

I tried to make her understand the differences and the benefits of going and not going. As far as how you want to live your life. (Rachel)

What really got her was when we went to Atlanta, Georgia to visit Spelman University and Clark University. We had some friends that took us out to dinner and everything. When you walk into a restaurant, it's all Black, okay, we're not talking about Popeye's, we're talking about an upscale restaurant that we walked into and it was majority Black and there may have been a hand full of Whites,

they were the minority. I asked her in the restaurant that night, is this something that you can get used to, because our town is totally different. We walk into a restaurant and we are the minority [in our town]. She said, “I love it, I love this momma.” (Megan)

I mean I think if you’re a mother, as long as you’re talking about education and letting them know that it [education] is of great value to in life. (Pamela)

I tried to steer them into the direction where I perceived their strengths to be and to get them into careers where they would be happy to get up in the morning because they would be making a contribution. That’s been the way that I’ve helped them move toward their whole educational journey. (Rita)

Each mother encouraged her daughter to help her understand the importance of having a formal education. Each mother emphasized the reward of going to college and getting a degree because they wanted their daughters to experience success in their lives.

In summary, these mothers communicated, utilized resources outside the home, addressed cultural identities, and empowered their daughters. The data revealed each mother had a distinct experience that allowed her to influence the educational experience of her daughter. In addition, the data formed a consistent pattern among the mothers that focused on helping the daughters attain educational success. The mothers described taking an active role in their daughters’ success and were very proud of their contribution to their educational achievement.

Chapter Ten: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter highlights the findings in this study that are relevant to the research questions, and the similarities and variations of the single Black mothers' participation in influencing the educational success of their daughters. I also discuss the limitations of the study, how my findings contribute to the research stemming from the frameworks of resilience and motherwork, and address recommendations for practice. I give my overall conclusion of the study, focusing on communication and interaction with the daughters, resources used outside the home to support the daughters' educational experience, and addressing cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment. Finally, I suggest future studies on Black parenting that may advance this body of research and a more in-depth understanding of the issue.

Summary of Findings

The section summarizes the findings. First, I provide a brief synopsis of each mother's life and educational experiences. Next, I present my findings by research questions. Finally, I compare and contrast my findings with those of prior research.

Mothers' life and educational experiences.

Synclaire. College was always the expectation in Synclaire's family. Both of her grandparents attended college. She revealed, "Pretty much everyone in my family has a college degree." The task of getting a college degree was all she ever knew. Synclaire was raised by her grandparents, then by her mother. Synclaire's motivation was to make sure her daughter knew who she was, because her mother did not raise her the first 8

years of her life and that influences her relationship with her mother. She and her mother were not close in the beginning, but have repaired their relationship over the years.

Synclaire has a bachelor's degree from a private university. She is a single mother with one daughter. Her daughter is currently enrolled as a junior at an HBCU. The father of their daughter does not play a role in the daughter's life. However, Synclaire has a huge village that consists of family and friends that have helped raise her daughter.

Rachel. Rachel lived with her mother, who didn't communicate the importance of education to her. Rachel disclosed, "We were pretty much free spirits." This meant that Rachel and her siblings raised themselves and did whatever they wanted to do with no concrete rules or boundaries. Rachel and her mother had minimal contact with one another and are not close. Rachel does not have a college degree, but took some college courses and finished court reporting school. Therefore, Rachel has some exposure to education beyond high school. She is a single mother with two daughters who married after her oldest was out of the home. Her oldest has a bachelor's degree from a public institution and graduated with her master's degree in May 2011. The father of her oldest does not play a role in the daughter's life, but his family plays an active role. Rachel's goal as a mother was to make sure she was present, active, and supportive in her daughters' lives because she wanted more for her daughters than she received from her own mother.

Megan. Megan was raised by her mother. Her father died before she was born. Her mother worked nights, but was supportive. Megan's mother once told her, "I don't

care what you do or what happens, you're going to march across the stage, you're going to finish school." In that moment, Megan realized the importance of education and never looked back. Even when she was diagnosed with breast cancer she still continued with her education. Megan had a bachelor's degree from an HBCU and a master's degree from an online university, both in accounting. She is a single mother with one daughter and a son. She is divorced, but her ex-husband remains supportive and hands-on with their children. Her daughter is currently enrolled as a junior at an HBCU. Megan's education and experiences have driven her to motivate her daughter and to help her understand the power of education just like Megan's mother instilled in her during childhood.

Pamela. Pamela was raised by her father and grandmother. Since her father was in the military the majority of the parenting fell on her grandmother. Since her grandmother worked full time, she had no parental involvement. She revealed, "If I didn't want to go to school, I didn't go and I'm surprised I made it to high school." Although she did make it to high school, she dropped out in the 10th grade. Pamela is a single mother with three daughters and one son. The eldest daughter has a bachelor's degree in accounting from a private university. The father of her daughter was never involved in their lives. Based upon her lack of education, Pamela wanted her children to get their education. She recognized her limitations because of her lack of education and did not want her children to have those same limitations and struggle through life.

Rita. Rita grew up in a home with a strong mother and stable father. Both parents

always encouraged her to do well in school and look ahead toward getting a college degree. Rita has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in student personnel, and a doctorate in education. Rita is a single mother of three daughters and has been married and divorced. When we interviewed, she chose to talk about all three daughters simultaneously. The oldest daughter has a bachelor's degree from an HBCU and her master's from a private university. The middle daughter has a bachelor's in chemistry and a master's in environmental management, both from private universities. The youngest daughter is currently enrolled as a senior at a private university and plans to get her master's degree as well. The oldest two daughters have a relationship with their father, but the youngest does not. Rita's motivation for higher education was economic. She divulged, "I was going to school and the reason I have pushed hard to educate myself is because I did not want to be in poverty." Based on her explanation it is clear that she did not want her daughters to live their lives in poverty either.

Findings Related to the Research Questions.

How do mothers communicate and interact with their daughters regarding educational success at stages from early childhood through high school?

The mothers communicated and interacted with their daughters in two major ways: being involved with their daughters and talking with their daughters. For example, Synclaire's portrait illustrates her desire for her daughter, Mackenzie, to understand that she would always be there for her. Synclaire revealed, "I wanted to make sure that she

knew from day one, if nobody else in this world has her back, her momma will always be there for her, bottom line.” In Rachel’s narrative she reveals her main goal was to be present in Lakyn’s life as well. Rachel expressed, “I wanted to be good role model to them. I always knew that I wanted to be the type of mother that was present, that knew what was going on and talked to them.” In Megan’s story she discussed her own school experience with her daughter Courtney to provide a perspective on the importance of education and the opportunities it would provide in Courtney’s future. With Pamela, she indicated that by constantly verbalizing the importance of education to Jasmine, she was able to play a critical role in Jasmine finishing high school and obtaining a college degree. In Rita’s portrait, she would try to steer her daughters in the direction that would allow them to be successful.

The actions of being involved and talking with their daughters by the mothers seemed to build a level a trust with their daughters. This agreed with the literature that asserts the daughter trusts that her mother has prepared her to deal with life and the daughter knows that her mother is willing and able to help her (Turnage, 2004). And most importantly, the accessibility of Black mothers supports the daughter in knowing that “someone loves, respects, and takes care of her unconditionally” (p. 159). When trust is built between the mother and daughter, the mother is able to not only communicate and interact more effectively; she is able to influence the daughter on the importance of having an education. All the daughters in this study give the impression

that they trusted their mothers on the importance of education because they have all attained academic success in their lives.

Stemming from their own personal experiences during childhood and adolescence these mothers were motivated to communicating, interacting, and encouraging their daughters' educational experiences. All the mothers revealed a personal experience about their education or parents' education that helped them realize the importance of education. The mothers in this study wanted their daughters to have an opportunity for a better life than they had. For example, in Pamela's portrait, I discovered how she did not have parental involvement, but still wanted more for her children.

I guess my roughness was really because I didn't have any parent to force me to get an education or tell me how important an education was. So that was my number one goal to make sure they got an education, at least high school and college, if possible.

In Rita's portrait, her mother was involved and talked with her about the importance of education.

She [my mother] always instilled that she was willing to make whatever sacrifice she had to make for that to happen. It just meant that the way that our family values were, education was just real, real important.

Depending on whether the mothers were guided toward the importance of education or not, all the mothers communicated and actively participated in nurturing the importance of education with their daughters because they wanted more opportunities and a better life for them. These findings supported Boyd-Franklin (1989b), Coleman

(1986), and Hill (1972) who asserted that Black parents tend to believe that education and a strong work ethic are necessary traits for upward social mobility, given the historical societal barriers. The mothers aspired for their children to surpass them socioeconomically (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982). The narratives told by these Black mothers revealed that they recognized the education of their children could be the difference between them thriving in life or “slinging drugs,” “dodging bullets,” and “having a bunch of babies” (Cooper, 2007, p. 499). In addition, the literature stated that to encourage education and work ethic, Black parents teach their children shared family responsibilities, encourage academic success, and to pursue career goals (Barnes, 1985; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982; Jordan, 1991).

In summary, the mothers were able to effectively communicate the importance of education to their daughters by consistently talking with them and interacting with their daughters by remaining involved in their personal and educational experiences. The mothers’ experiences shaped their behaviors and how they influenced their daughters’ outlook on education.

What resources do mothers draw upon outside their home regarding their daughters’ education experience? The mothers also relied on resources outside the home that supported the educational experiences of their daughters. Some of the critical ways the mothers utilized resources were through school involvement, outside activities, and family/friend support. Each mother expressed her desire to ensure her daughter was in a good school environment to be academically successful and was exposed to

different experiences outside the home. Synclaire's joined the parent teacher association (PTA) and other organizations to experience news and events in her daughter's school. By being involved, Synclaire connected with one of the school principals who helped her navigate the school system, which aided in her choosing an academically strong middle school for her daughter. This middle school funneled into one of the academically best high schools in the city. Rachel was not happy with her daughter's school district and moved her out to the suburbs to a better academic school district because the school had a higher ranking. Because of the higher ranking Rachel felt the new school district would provide her daughter with a better educational experience than her previous school district. Megan's portrait highlighted the importance of school involvement and using other parents as a resource. Megan gathered information from other parents on schools in her city when she was making her decision on whether her daughter would attend public or private schools.

I met other people that had also taken their kids out of Catholic school. I spoke with them and asked them how was their kids were doing? Some had good opinions about it and some didn't.

In addition, Megan made sure she constantly communicated with her daughter's teachers on her behalf. She stated, "We kind of challenged the teacher, to step up to the plate, you need to teach our kids." Pamela was not really involved in school activities, because she was always working. Rita took advantage of an opportunity for her oldest daughter to attend a private school and her other two daughters followed suit. Rita felt private school

would prepare her daughters academically and socially for college and interviewed school administrators about their schools before enrolling her daughters.

According to Cooper (2005) Black parents from low-income or working class families are perceived to be active choosers or non-choosers (Fuller & Elmore, 1996). Cooper (2005) defines school choice as how Black mothers choose schools for their children based on their own experiences in public schools, educational goals for their children, and their views about school options. When faced with school overcrowding, high teacher turnover, declining academic performance, survival in society, and the high stakes of a good education, these mothers were motivated to explore their school choice options (Cooper, 2007). Cooper asserts that Black mothers feel the need to stay on guard “to ensure that educational inequality does not undermine their children’s life chances” (p. 504). Therefore, Black mothers “strive to be their children’s ‘voice,’ to ‘follow’ their kids where they go, to have a ‘visible presence’ in schools, and ‘keep close tabs’ on teachers” (p. 504).

It is assumed that Black parents place less emphasis on academic factors when choosing schools than White parents because they lack the knowledge to make good educational choices (Cookson, 1992; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Henig, 1996; Moe, 1995). However, the portraits from this study revealed that all the mothers, used their own childhood educational experiences to gauge how they wanted their daughters to be treated in the school system. In addition, some mothers actively

sought out the knowledge necessary to ensure their daughters were in positive school environments.

Each mother participated in activities with their daughters outside of school. The portraits revealed the outside activities provided the combination of life and educational lessons. Some mothers viewed taking trips to museums or plays as a way of embracing cultural themes and a venue for discussion with their daughters. Rita and Megan took road trips to HBCUs and cities on the east coast with a heavy Black population in order to allow their daughters to experience that environment. Synclaire went on mini-trips to the park, zoo, or in the neighborhood with her daughter to learn about animals and nature. Participating in outside activities added overall life and educational value to their daughters' lives.

All mothers were able draw upon family/friend support to instill the value of education and provide care when the mothers were unable to provide care due to work responsibilities. In Rachel's portrait, one of her sisters moved to the town where Rachel resided and helped care for her daughter. She recalls, "One of my sisters moved to the same city I resided and she was a big help also." In Synclaire's and Megan's portraits, family played a critical role in positive thinking and mentoring on the importance of education. Finally, Rita's portrait illustrated how parents use social networks to help with her daughters. For instance, Rita used her social network with her daughters' friends' parents to help with transporting their children back and forth from school activities.

I had a way of developing networks with their friends' parents, so that lots of times we could car pool together or my daughters would spend the weekend with them or their daughters would spend the weekend with me, so that I could have some time to myself, too.

Pamela was the only mother who said that she did not allow anyone other than her mother or step-dad to help with her children in any way, she felt caring for her children was totally her responsibility. She stated:

Occasionally my mother and step-dad would, but no, I would not let them go off with anyone else. We pretty much did everything, like I said, we grew up together. We did everything together.

In contrast to the literature, Collins (1987) emphasizes that *blood mothers* are expected to raise and care for their children, but in the Black community, it is culturally accepted that several women assume mothering duties. Thus, the popular term "it takes a village to raise a child" is used in the Black community. *Other mothers*, who assist *blood mothers* with the distribution of mothering responsibilities, are central to Black motherhood (Troester, 1984). In these communities, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins are *other mothers* by acting as childcare providers for each other's children. If needed, these childcare arrangements can be turned into long-term care or informal adoption (Martin & Martin, 1978). This illustrated in Synclaire's portrait when she talked about living with her grandparents:

I lived with my grandparents until I was eight, so from birth to eight, those were my parents. She would come down for the holidays, I knew who she was, but it felt more like she was an aunt, it was mother in a relative term instead of mother in a day-to-day hands on term.

All the portraits demonstrate the role of “other mothers” in caring for the daughters. In addition, there were other fathers who provided support as well in the experiences of Synclaire and Megan.

The portraits revealed that the mothers used resources outside the home to ensure their daughters experienced life lessons outside the home which allowed the daughters to be well-rounded and self-sufficient individuals. Although the mothers were serious about their parental roles, there were times when they simply needed outside resources to help with providing care for their daughters. The mothers were able to use these resources to help them provide the best overall care for their daughters while exposing them to life lessons.

How do mothers address concerns of cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with their daughters in the context of educational success? The mothers addressed cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment with their daughters to support their academic achievement. Some of the ways the mothers addressed these topics were by communicating their perception of environment, talking with their daughters, advocating for their daughters, and encouraging their daughters. The mothers used her own perception of her environment as a tool to address and influence their daughter and to provide ways for her daughters to be able to exist in this society. Synclaire’s comment on perception provided a good explanation.

You’re judged on the fact of your height, your weight, the color of your skin, where you went to school, how you speak, everything about you. You’re always

going to have to work harder, you're always going to have to be smarter, you're always going to have to be better and it's sad that it's that way, but that's the way it is.

Cooper (2003, 2005, 2007) found the way Black mothers demonstrated educational care can be culturally relevant, gendered, and supporting. These studies confirmed that Black women displayed care in a distinctive way, which “meant promoting cultural integrity, communal and individual survival, spiritual growth, and political change under oppressive conditions” (Thompson, 2004, p. 29). This supports why the mothers in the study promoted growth in areas outside of the educational realm.

Personal experiences contributed to the mothers addressing cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment. Each of the mothers had an experience rooted in racism, Black identity, or endurance that influenced how they dealt with their daughters as Black females in American society. For example, Rita's explained her frustration when applying for a job. She said, “I applied for two Academic Dean job[s], and in both cases, the people who got the jobs were White males with fewer, lesser credentials than me.” Rita also discussed fighting with peers because of her skin color and eventually did not try hard in school and “dumbed” herself down because she needed to survive without being in fights all the time. Megan's and Pamela's portraits demonstrated how to endure for their children. Megan maintained a strong family foundation for her daughter while fighting against breast cancer. Pamela endured by being homeless at one time and still caring for her children and instilling the importance of education in her daughter.

In comparison to the literature, Fordham and Ogbu, (1986) point out that Black students are lower performing than White students in school because “they experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success” (p. 177). This could explain why Rita chose to “act dumb” due to the pressures from her Black peers. Rita expressed:

When I got to junior high, lots of times, I would get beat up would be if I got on the honor roll. So if I was going to get beat up because I was on the honor roll, then I stopped working so hard. So I got to the point where a C was okay, and that kept me from getting an Black eye of what now everybody’s looking at as bullying, that was going on big time as far as what was happening to me in junior high school. It just got to the point where I could do more, but I didn’t.

The literature also addresses racism and negative messages. In Rita’s narrative we also learned that racism affected her personally and how this experience shaped her empowerment of her daughter. In prior research, we learn that Black mothers are often the only parent in the household. They can help their daughter face the negative messages that are often directed at Black females (Turnage, 2004). For example, Rachel was able to console her daughter when other children were making fun of her daughter’s body parts. Rachel said, “I remember her being made fun of because they felt like she had a big butt, and you know, just stereotypical stuff like that where they knew she was different.” This allows the Black mother to serve as a mechanism of growth and a role model as she trains her daughter to address the harm that can result when Black features are devalued and mocked (Sanders-Thompson, 1994; Scott, 1991). Rachel was able to comfort her daughter and to let her know that she was still loved. The experience of

these scars motivates the Black mothers to protect their daughters from experiencing the same scars, by training their daughters to cultivate self-esteem (Turnage, 2004). As the mothers address specific situations in their experiences, they pass on the lessons learned to their daughters to help them navigate similar experiences they may face.

The findings in the study support prior research on Black mothers. These mothers were able to prepare their daughters for life in American society in addition to their educational success. The mothers had insight on how society may view them as Black females based on their experience and prepared their daughters to handle the same issues that were brought to the forefront in their mothers' experiences.

In relation to the three research questions, the mothers were able to communicate and interact with their daughters, utilize resources outside the home, and address cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment to influence the educational experience of their daughters. Even though the mothers had a distinct way in which they interacted with their daughters, each mother found a way to impart the message of educational importance. Four of the mothers revealed they needed resources outside the home to ensure their daughters were well rounded and exposed to different environments. One mother revealed she did not use any resources other than her family to provide care at times. However, each mother needed someone outside the home to help support their daughters' educational experience.

Finally, all mothers addressed the topics of cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment to facilitate growth and prepare their daughters to exist successfully in

society and thrive as young Black females. My research clearly indicates that Black mother do care about how their daughters social and academic success.

Non-focuses of the Study

My research focused on single Black mothers and, therefore, findings may not be generalized to their Black male counterparts. The sample of participants in this study included only Black mothers and generalizations to other racial-ethnic groups might not be possible. The sample size for this study was too small for generalization to be made for all Black mothers. The small qualitative sample used in this study requires the reader to determine his or her own thoughts about the data results. I tried to be as transparent as possible with each portrait so that the readers could “see and feel” the mothers as I had experienced.

There is a possibility that one of the mothers withheld an opinion, belief, or experience. In addition, I am a single Black mother. I am aware of the bias that I may have brought to the study because of my race and gender. I used my notes from journaling and coding the interviews as recommended in portraiture as checkpoints (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). This ensured that any bias I may have had in this research study and counteracted the impression that I was the only expert on the lives and experiences of the Black mothers and daughters. Indeed, the mothers were the true experts.

Contribution to the Research Literature

There are limited studies on Black parenting, specifically Black mothers. The majority of parenting research is focused on White, non-Hispanic families (Cooper, 2007) and is racially biased (Cooper, 2009). Black parents, specifically those with low incomes or working status, are linked “to a dichotomy that constructs them as lacking educational presence, values, and care when contrasted with White, middle-class parents who are constructed as being present, helpful, and caring” (Cooper, 2009, p. 382). The findings of this study present different perspectives of Black mothers and their interactions with their daughters, whereas most studies focus on the experiences and behaviors of White, middle-class mothers. The portraits of these Black mothers are an innovative addition to research.

The examination of the relationship between the Black mothers and their daughters provides insights into how the daughters were successful in life and academics. The findings allow other researchers to have a better understanding of how prevalent motherwork is when exploring the behavior of Black mothers.

The findings also indicate Black mothers have the same characteristics as White, middle-class mothers. The Black mothers in this study were very involved with their daughters from early childhood through high school and supported their educational experiences. This suggests that Black mothers are just as viable as White, middle class mothers in supporting the academic success of their children. The study also indicates implications beyond academic achievement, such as resilience in Black mothers.

Conclusion

There is a strong association between parental involvement and the academic success of children (Epstein, 2001). Currently, most of the research on parenting focuses on White, middle-class parents. There is a false dichotomy that depicts Black parents as having a “lack of educational presence, values, and care compared to White, middle-class parents” (Cooper, 2009, p. 382). However, the mothers in my study were passionate about being present, having values, and setting educational aspirations for their daughters.

Although these mothers had experiences related to racism and poverty, they were able to understand and communicate the importance of education to their daughters. In addition, they realized education was a critical tool for improving their lives as a family. Furthermore, single Black mothers in American society are automatically depicted in a negative perspective, but this study provides evidence of positive traits of Black mothers.

There is still an achievement gap between Black students and their White counterparts. Parents are an important factor in helping set high academic aspirations. Slaughter and Epps (1987) assert Black parents influence their children’s academic achievement directly by the kind of educational environment they provide inside the home. The findings in my study indicate that these Black mothers communicated, actively participated, and addressed cultural identity, endurance, and empowerment inside and outside the home to influence the educational success of their daughters.

My findings suggest that single Black mothers do care about their children's academic success. The portraits of these mothers did not agree with the literature that shows that Black mothers are inactive, disconnected, hostile, or challenging (Cooper, 2005; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Edwards, 1993; Henig, 1994; Koonce & Harper, 2005) and tend to be irrational, threatening, and have a lack of care for their children's education (Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1989; Johnson & Staples, 2005; Wallace, 1979). To the contrary, my results show the mothers as loving, caring, encouraging, involved, and empowering and advocates of their daughters. Further, the mothers were willing to do what they needed in order to communicate the importance of education and support the academic success of their daughters. Not a single mother expressed a lack of educational care or appeared inactive in her daughter's life.

Ultimately, I found five mothers who did all they could, given their experiences and exposure, to ensure their daughters were academically successful.

Recommendation for Practice

Each mother had a personal experience in their past that led them to encourage their daughters to understand the benefits of having a formal education. If mothers wish to enhance their parental involvement, it appears that a partnership must take place between the parents, school administrators, and teachers. Parents must be willing to advocate for their children and school administrators and teachers must embrace and accept an involved parent as an ally, not an enemy. In this study, the mothers shared experiences that helped them support their daughters' academic success. The mothers

put forth a conscious effort to initially contact with the schools to advocate on behalf of their daughters and support other challenges such as cultural identity and empowerment of their daughters.

From this study, there are strategies that can help mothers with some of the issues they face while raising their children from early childhood through high school to ensure their academic success. Each mother was able to provide some wisdom about helping her daughter be successful in life and academics. For example, Megan provided an overall perspective:

It doesn't matter if you have a college degree or not. Your kids don't have to fall back into your footsteps or where you have walked. As long as you are carrying a positive attitude and you are letting your children know they can be and do whatever they set their minds to do, then you don't have to have a college degree. It would be wise to set an example so you can say, look what I have. Look what I have done. So when you do speak, you can say I have been down that road before. If you don't have it [the experience], then provide them with that support. That's something that they're going to need in order to obtain what you couldn't. Whether it was because you couldn't afford it or your mind just wasn't set to go to college. Provide them with the support and positive thinking. There are lots of resources out there if you don't have the money to send your child to school. Go on the web. There are lots of scholarships, as well as foundations and organizations that are willing to help you get your child through college. Don't give up on them even if they fall short or they kind of slip off that positive road. Put them back on it. Sometimes we want to be friends before we are parents. I think we need to always maintain a parent relationship with our children and let them establish their own friends. We can have fun with our kids and still be a parent.

In my analysis, I found that the mothers wanted their daughters to have a prosperous and satisfying life. The mothers felt that a solid education would allow their daughters to

attain this lifestyle. Therefore, the mothers took the education of their daughters seriously and monitored their school and social activities. Some of the mothers even used outside resources such as school involvement, outside activities, and family/friend support to supplement the daughters' academics. Parents must be willing to take a stand for their children's best interest. Furthermore, parental involvement can urge school administrators to be accountable in the classroom, and a partnership between parents, teachers, and administration can be established.

Future Research

Since there is substantial research literature written on the negative traits of Black mothers, I encourage further research on Black parenting, specifically Black mothers. This is important in order to understand what Black mothers have done and are doing "correctly" to influence the academic success of their children. My research clearly indicates that these Black mothers have engaged in activities with their daughters that resulted in the daughters' academic success. However there are limited studies investigating Black parenting as a factor in preparing Black children to be college ready and graduate with a college degree. Reddick and Willie (2010) support my recommendation on future studies involving Black mothers. They assert that little has been written about mothers and their contribution to the success of their children, which brings about the assumption that mothers are being ignored.

With additional research, new literature could continue the process of counteracting the negative messages reflected in some of the current research that is

harmful to Black parents and their children. This could begin to heal the Black community to some degree and change the educational focus for Black parents and their children.

Finally, further research studies could provide a new and fresh perspective that will offset current ideologies behind the educational practices of educators. Furthermore, since Black women lead the nation in the percentage of births to unmarried women, this additional knowledge can provide more insight on how single Black mothers raise their daughters can enhance educator's experiences with these Black mothers and daughters.

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment E-mail

Greetings [insert groups],

My name is Audra Sneed and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. I am conducting a research project on single Black mothers and how they raise their daughters. This study will investigate the strategies and practices the Black mothers use in order to ensure their daughters enroll in college or graduate from college. (IRB approval #)

I am contacting you because this listserv will aid me in identifying single Black mothers for my study. I am looking for participants who are single Black mothers with a daughter who is currently enrolled in college or has graduated from 4-year accredited institution. I would like to interview Black mothers who have a doctoral, masters, bachelors, or some college. Participation will include three 60-minute individual interviews with the mothers. Appointments will be scheduled with each participant with an agreed time and location convenient to you.

Each mother will receive a \$75 Visa gift card upon completion of the three interviews. The participation in this study is voluntary and if chosen for this study all information shared will remain confidential.

This research is interesting to me because I am a single Black mother and I value the educational experience with my daughter and it is my hope she will enroll in college and graduate. In addition, I feel it is important to understand how Black mothers raise of their children to be successful in getting a college degree.

Sincerely,

Audra Sneed
Doctoral Student
University of Texas at Austin

Appendix B

First Individual Interview Protocol

Script-

Thank you for agreeing to interview with me regarding my research project. As mentioned during our pre-screening meeting this interview will allow me to hear your voice and experience as a single Black mother as you navigated your daughter's educational experience. There will be three interviews conducted for this study. The second will build upon our interview today and the third interview will serve as a follow up for reflection and any questions or clarifications I may have.

As a reminder, if you do not wish to answer a certain question during the interview please respond with "I prefer not to answer this question." If at any time you decide to stop the interview and remove yourself from the study, please let me know and all documentation, including any dialogue will be destroyed and will not be used in this study.

Do you have any questions before we start the interview? Let's begin. [Turn digital recorder on and begin asking questions in a semi-structured format to guide the interview.]

1. What is your philosophy on motherhood? Do you believe you were an effective mother? What were your goals as a mother?
2. When did you first realize you were Black? What was your first memory of racial identity? Has racism affected you? If so how?
3. What did your parents teach you about education?
4. Tell me about our own education history. What kind of schools did you attend? How did they compare to your parent's school; segregated or desegregated? How did your schools impact you?
5. How did your school experiences shape what you wanted for your daughter's education?

Thank you for your participation in the first interview. I hope this was a positive and meaningful experience for you. Are there any questions? Would you like to continue in this study and schedule a second interview? [If they answer yes, schedule a place and time for the second interview] I look forward to meeting with you for the second interview. The second interview will build upon the first interview and we will discuss your goals and aspirations for your daughter's education. Thank you and I will see you soon!

Appendix C

Second Individual Interview Protocol

Script-

Thank you for agreeing to the second and follow up interview with me about my research project. As mentioned during our first interview meeting this second interview will allow me to build upon the first interview as we continue our dialogue about your voice and experience as a single Black mother as you navigated your daughter's educational experience.

As a reminder, if you do not wish to answer a certain question during the interview please respond with "I prefer not to answer this question." If at any time you decide to stop the interview and remove yourself from the study, please let me know and all documentation, including any dialogue will be destroyed and will not be used in this study.

Do you have any questions before we start the interview? Let's begin. [Turn digital recorder on and begin asking questions in a semi-structured format to guide the interview.]

1. Describe the time when you had to send your daughter off to kindergarten. What did you say? How did you feel? What about when you sent your daughter off to college?
2. How did you make decisions on which schools your daughter would attend while in elementary, middle and high school?
3. Why was the topic of education important to you and your daughter? When did you begin to talk with your daughter about going to college?
4. How did you approach talking about race and racial identity with your daughter? What strategies worked best on talking about race and racial identity with your daughter? Why? What strategies did not work? Why?
5. What was it like working outside the home? Describe how this did/did not affect your relationship with your daughter.

6. What activities were done inside the home to promote education? Outside the home?

Thank you for your participation in the second interview. I hope this was a positive and meaningful experience for you. Are there any questions? Would you like to continue in this study and schedule a third and final interview? [If they answer yes, schedule a place and time for the second interview]. The third interview will build upon the second interview and will serve as reflection on your daughter's success a follow-up for any questions and/or clarification points. Thank you and I will see you soon!

Appendix D

Third Individual Interview Protocol

Script-

Thank you for agreeing to interview with me about my research project. As mentioned during our pre-screening meeting this interview will allow me to hear your voice and experience as a daughter and to provide reflection your educational experience.

As a reminder, if you do not wish to answer a certain question during the interview please respond with “I prefer not to answer this question.” If at any time you decide to stop the interview and remove yourself from the study, please let me know and all documentation, including any dialogue will be destroyed and will not be used in this study.

Do you have any questions before we start the interview? Let’s begin. [Turn digital recorder on and begin asking questions in a semi-structured format to guide the interview.]

1. Do you consider yourself a successful person? How would you define your success thus far? Do you feel you have contributed to your daughter’s current success?
2. If you could change anything about your participation in your daughter’s educational experience what would you change?
3. Were there times when you were unable to provide support to your daughter during her educational experience? If yes, what do you feel some of the reasons were?
4. Were there people who helped you with caring for your daughter and her educational experience? If so can you describe who they were and what role they played in your daughter’s life?
5. Describe your ideas and dreams about your daughter’s education? What were your expectations for your daughter’s education? How does this match the current status of your daughter’s education?

Thank you for your participation in this study! Once all three interviews have been transcribed I will follow up with you via email, mail or in –person to have you read the contents. Please review the transcriptions of the interviews for accuracy and fact. As stated in the recruitment email here [issue gift card] is a \$75 Visa gift card in appreciation of your time and dedication to this study. I hope this has been a positive and meaningful experience for you. Thank you again.

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